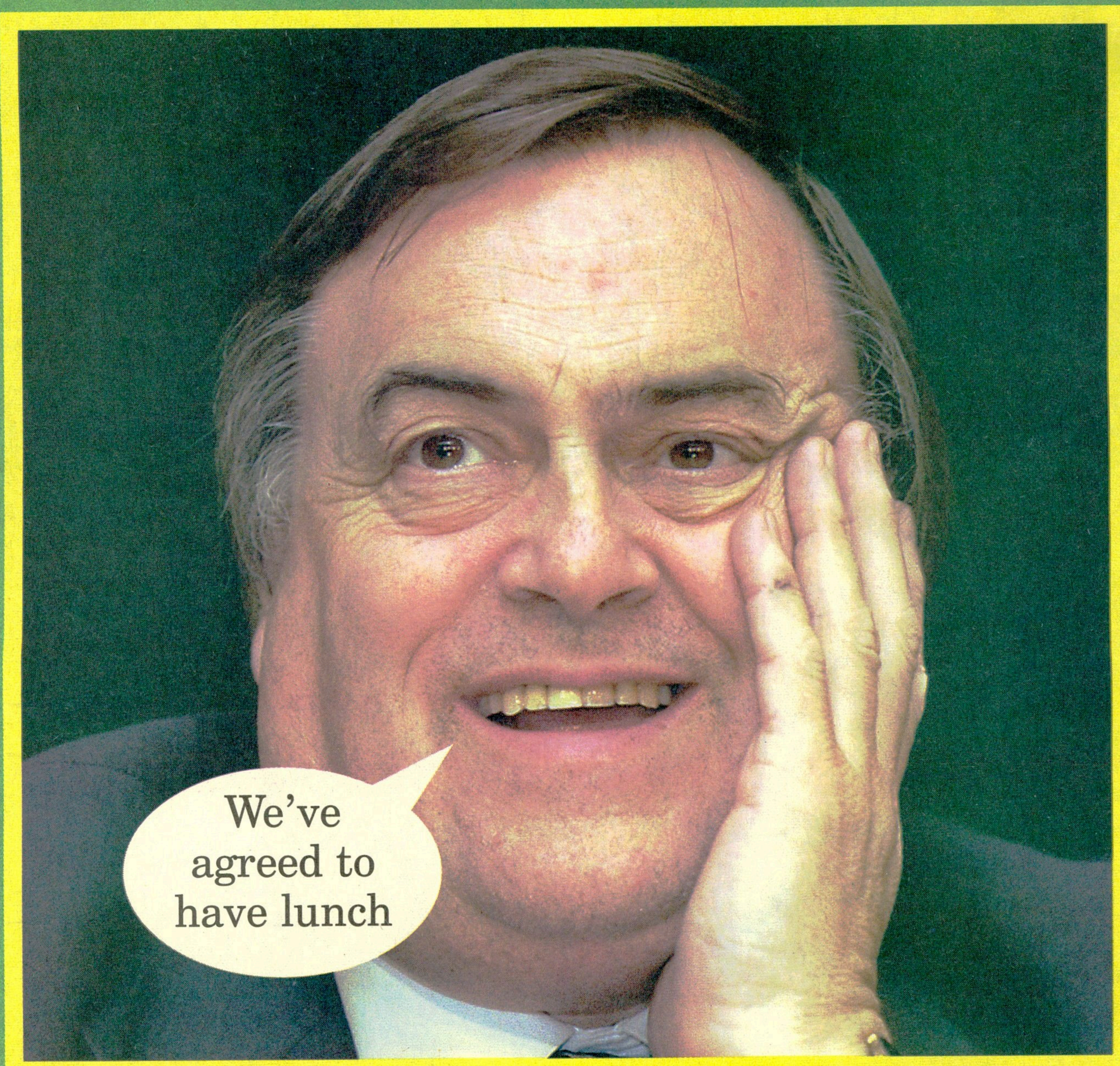
No. 1062
6 Sept. –
19 Sept. 2002
£1.20

PRIVATE EYE

EARTH SUMMIT BREAKTHROUGH



Gnome

What would Diana have thought about 9/11?

IT IS five years since the death of Diana Princess of Wales and yet it is only one year since the tragic events of 11 September.

And still the great unanswered question remains – what would the Queen of Hearts have made of the King of Tragedies?

No one knows for sure, but of one thing we can be certain.

We will never know.

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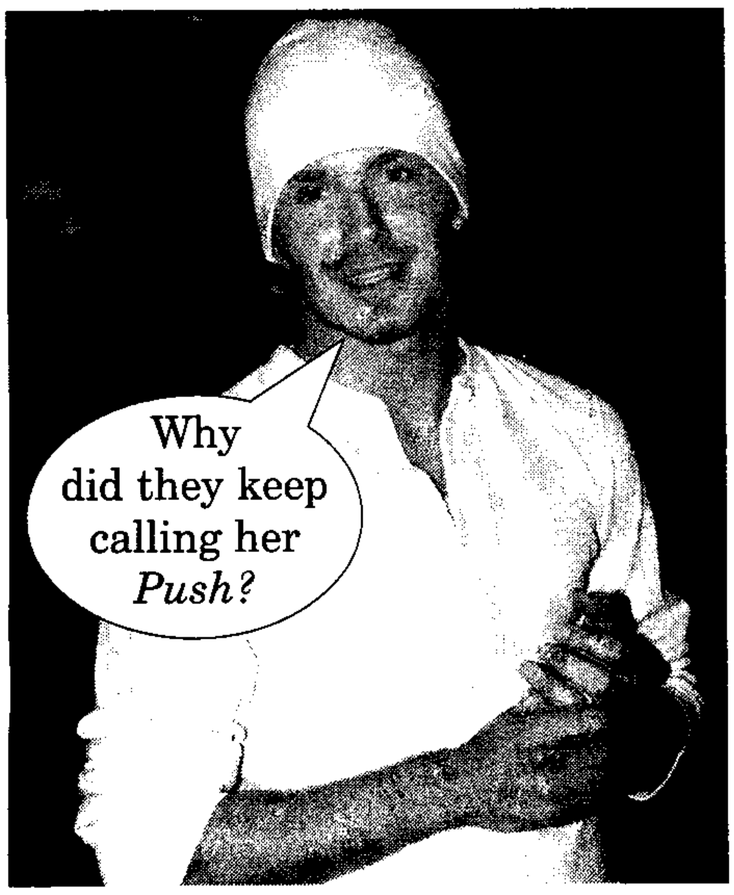

● *Note to readers: we know that she had a caesarian really so no need for any letters. Thanks. Ed.*

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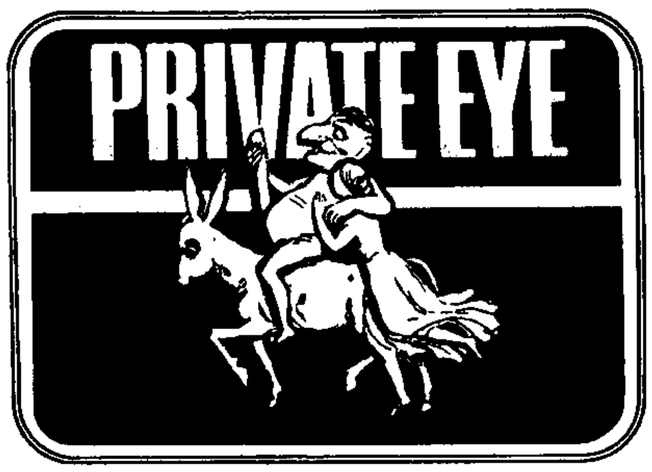
EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Tel: 020-7437 4017.
Fax: 020-7437 0705. Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
http://www.private-eye.co.uk

ADVERTISING
Tel: 020-7923 5402

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC



A Natural Gas

- *Warballs Anniversary Special 7*
- *Celebrity TV – the bottom of the barrel 8*
- *The HasBeano – Summer comic fun! 19*
- *Diary: Martin Amis on Stalin 23*
- *Slicker on Skellett & Wessex Water 28-29*

PLUS

- *The Beautiful Game: The Eye goes football crazy 1-94*

AS the autumn term began this week, thousands of new teachers, caretaker and other school staff had still not been vetted by the Criminal Records Bureau and were therefore not allowed to start work. No surprises there, since the CRB is run by our old friends Capita, for whom cock-ups are a way of life.

Capita's promise that it would vet all applications within three weeks (some people are waiting 13 weeks or more) has slipped back to the end of the year now. Tony Blair's favourite PFI outfit says it has been swamped with written applications when it was expecting 75 percent of them to be made by phone.

Utter Crapita, says one insider: "Applications come mainly from local authorities or health trusts and have to be signed by a designated officer – and you can't do that over the phone'.

The real cause of the cock-up is that Capita set the system up to scan the information in from application forms using optical character recognition (OCR). But OCR doesn't work with handwritten text, so everything had to be input manually and Capita didn't have the staff. In desperation, it sent wads of applications to India for processing – but the log-jam remains.

Still, as ministers keep pointing out, any temporary inconvenience is more than outweighed by the need to protect children. But what about protecting frail pensioners? Only a few weeks earlier, the department of health announced that criminal record checks for the owners of care homes could be abandoned. Faced with the failure of Crapita to complete the vetting by 1 August, as promised, Alan Milburn's department simply "removed" the deadline the day before it was due.

According to Ron Kerr, chief executive of the national care standards commission, "the absence of a deadline does not decrease the urgency or the importance of the criminal records bureau process". Indeed not: the department of health has now set a tough new deadline of… 1 August 2003. Given Crapita's track record, even another whole year may not be enough to finish the job.

● MARGARET HODGE was perhaps not the best choice of minister to be wheeled out in front of the TV cameras last week to explain away the shambles. As the far-left leader of Islington council from 1982 to 1992, she consistently denied that children supposedly in the council's care were being sexually abused. Three years after Hodge left, a government report found that paedophile activity had indeed been rife in council-run homes while she was in charge.

DAVID Miller, finance director of PFI favourites Amey, resigned in August following the firm's admission that its accounts were wrong by £61.3m and that it had actually made an £18.3m pre-tax loss rather than an anticipated profit.

The reason for this "confusion" (*sic*) was that company accounts are no longer allowed to treat the bidding costs for PFI schemes – involving an army of lawyers and accountants – as an investment.

All most embarrassing for Amey, of course, but no less so for the egg-spattered trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt. Last November the DTI gave a £35m, 12-year contract to Amey, the company which now employs her old colleague Baroness Jay alongside former Tory minister John Patten. In return Amey would run an "accounts service" for the department, which "will encompass all aspects of financial accounting and related systems support and will range from the management of staff claims and allowances to provision of Treasury functions and the reporting of key business indicators".

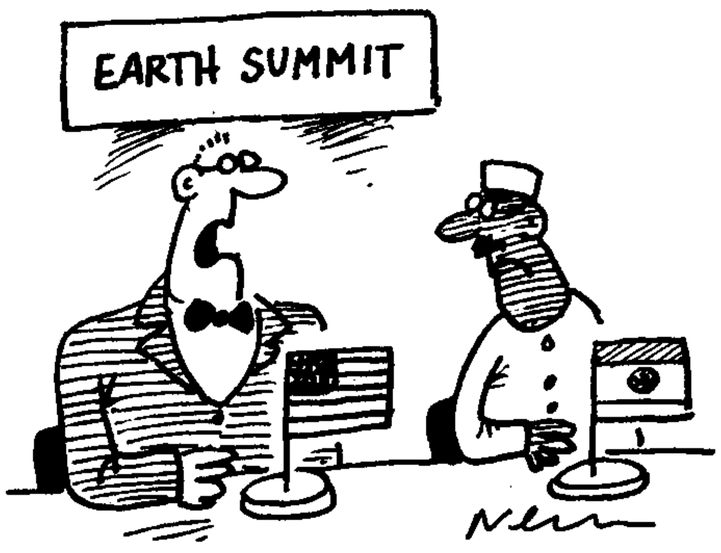
In short the DTI is now run by a minister, Hewitt, who previously worked for Andersen Consulting (erstwhile sister firm to disgraced accountants Arthur Andersen) – and who in turn has privatised the ministry's financial accounting to a company which has been forced to restate its own accounts to reflect more honestly its involvement in privatisation. Ain't life grandy and dandy!

ON the very day that the Financial Services Authority fined Royal & SunAlliance £1.35m for gross failure to compensate 13,500 customers they swindled in the great pensions mis-selling scandal, the Forge group heralded a new government initiative for corporate social responsibility. The initiative, said the group, "will be announced this autumn by the minister of state for e-business, commerce and competitiveness Stephen Timms, MP".

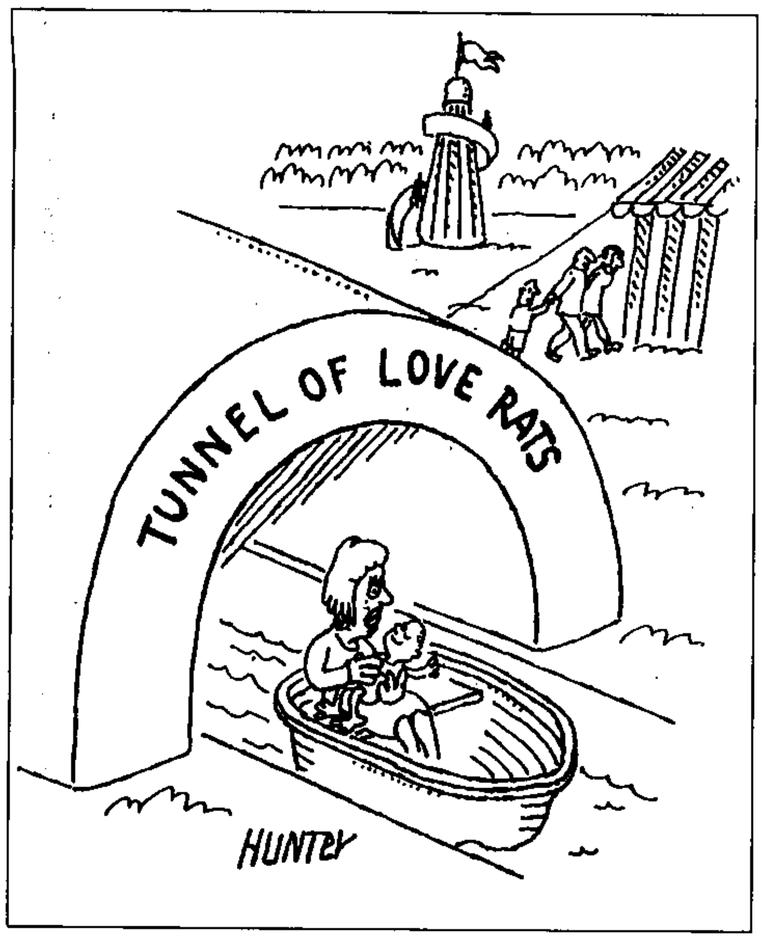
Welcoming the move on behalf of the Forge group, Ian Mullen chief executive of the British Bankers Association said: "Financial services companies have been at the forefront of developing corporate social responsibility practice". Proof of this is the membership of the Forge group, which includes executives from a glorious collection of pension mis-sellers, arms trade financiers and tax avoiders, including, er, Royal & SunAlliance.

MORE tales of examination marking mix-up's reach the *Eye*. Gary Evans, a French teacher and AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) examiner, informed the exam board that he wouldn't be able to assess any of the spoken French tapes this year. Nevertheless GCSE students' cassettes started to arrive at his home.

Several phone calls and the return of the tapes did not stop more packs arriving through the summer – seven packs in all. He thought the message had got through when in mid-July no more tapes arrived. Except that, when he returned from holiday on 18 August – just three days before the GCSE results were supposed to go out – he found another pack of 20 candidates' tapes waiting to be marked. He rang AQA which collected the pack that day. They tapes were destined for another Mr Evans, who apparently managed to mark them in time.



"We're opposed to all targets except Iraq"



NEWS

COMPLAINING bitterly in his local sub post-office that the DVLA in Swansea had lost his passport, Mark Brazier was shocked to learn that he was merely one of three that week with similar complaints.

Deciding it was too much of a coincidence he endeavoured to find out more and discovered that no less than 3,500 passports or birth certificates sent as proof of ID to DVLA have disappeared in the last 12 months.

Sure enough the licensing agency confirmed that there had been 3,474 compensation payouts to people complaining that their documentation had not been returned. And that was a mere 0.06 percent of 5.4 million photocard licenses issued. What's more it added that Royal Mail had accepted it was to blame for 70 percent of those. So that's all right then.

TRADE secretary Patricia Hewitt found another perfect candidate for a key government job last month when she appointed one Bridget Blow to the industrial development advisory board, a body which oversees millions of pounds of "regional selective assistance grants" dished out to big firms.

Blow is chief executive of ITNet, aka SHITNet, a company with some experience of taking public money. In Islington, where it has a contract to run the housing benefits service, it was recently fined £40,000 by the council for its abysmal standards of performance.

Complaints about Blow's firm go back a long way. When local MP Jeremy Corbyn visited ITNet's Islington operation a couple of years ago to check rumours that 21,000 benefit-application letters remained unopened, ITNet acted swiftly by putting the envelopes through an automatic letter-opener – and then leaving them in an unread pile. More recent blunders highlighted by Islington's other MP, former cabinet minister Chris Smith, include falsely accusing pensioners of attempted fraud, in a letter described by the MP as "inexcusably offensive". During the last council elections Chris Smith told the *Highbury Express*: "Labour is committed to cracking down on ITNet and, if necessary, getting rid of them completely."

Did he forget to mention it to his colleague Patricia Hewitt?

A TRAVELLER with one arm and one leg is hopping mad at Bedford's zone boys.

Bedfordshire on Sunday

Street Of Shame

"ARE sixth formers brighter than those of 20 years ago, or has the system been skewed to help them do better?" the *Daily Mirror* asked after publication of the A-level results last month. Comparing questions on Shakespeare from English literature papers now and then, it suggested that the modern exam "requires less understanding of the play". The *Sun*, too, noted that "many critics claim today's students have a poor grasp of basic English".

Compare that with the linguistic excellence displayed by those products of the good old days, Piers "Morgan" Moron and David Yelland. "Romeo, Romeo, *Why* For Art Thou Romeo?" the *Mirror*'s front-page headline quipped on Monday, reporting the birth of a new baby to Posh and Becks. Not to be outdone, the *Sun*'s splash also asked "Why For Art Thou Romeo?"

Had Moron and Yelland paid the slightest attention in English classes, they would know that "wherefore" does in fact mean "why".

Still, Fleet Street's puzzlement at the arrival of little Romeo Beckham is understandable. "Victoria Beckham will give birth to a girl next month and plans to name her Paris," the London *Evening Standard* reported on 8 August. It quoted a "friend" of the couple: "Victoria and David are both over the moon. They didn't mind whether it was a boy or a girl but are so pleased it will be a girl. They have been discussing what to call her and will probably go for Paris because they love the name."

Although the Beckhams denied the story, the hacks knew better. On 21 August, a *Sun* "exclusive" revealed that David had rushed Victoria to hospital for a check on their baby. An unnamed "source" at the hospital told the paper that Victoria "wept tears of joy after medics listened to the tot's heartbeat with a monitor and pronounced the unborn girl perfectly healthy". Three days later the *Mirror* noted that "a new baby is on the way in the Posh and Becks house, a girl, and she will be called Paris. Vicks, bless 'er, probably thought Paris – with the filthy Seine, phallic Eiffel Tower and hunchback in residence – spelt out 'class'."

Just as the *Mirror* editor, bless 'im, still thinks that Moron spells out "quality journalism".

WHEN the *New York Post*'s Page Six gossip column reported that "two of hip-hop's hottest are now the rap world's premier power couple", hack Ian Spiegelman could barely contain his excitement. "Jay-Z and Beyoncé Knowles have been publicly canoodling all over town in the last few days, confirming rumours that they're more than just industry acquaintances."

It was music to the ears of that well known hip-hop enthusiast Nigel Dempster, who reported on the tryst two days later in his *Mail on Sunday* diary, repeating Spiegelman's story almost word for word. An anonymous "onlooker" apparently provided the exact same quote to both the NY diarist and the *Mail*'s premier exponent of ghetto fabulous style, save that where he told Spiegelman of "cell phones" and a "limo", he spoke of "mobile phones" and a "limousine" to MC Dumpster.

Never ones to miss a trick, the *Mirror*'s 3AM "Girls" had already lifted the same story from the *New York Post* for their column on Saturday, adding one of their own trademark bitchy comments at the end to emphasise their celeb party lifestyle (and hide the fact they'd spent Friday night surfing the net in search of secondhand stories to fill the page up).

TIM Walker's final days as Nigel Dempster's deputy at the *Daily Mail*, before heading for the Mandrake seat at the *Sunday Telegraph*, ended in fitting fashion at Northcliffe House on Bank Holiday Monday.

One of Dempster's minions, Ulla Kloster, decided she wanted to watch *From Russia With Love* on the office television and turned it on. Editing the column in Dumpster's absence, Walker decided the noise was too distracting and turned it off. Kloster turned it back on again. Walker suggested if she was so desperate to watch the film then she should go home and do so. Kloster refused.

The dispute could have gone on till Bond disposed of Rosa Klebb, but Walker brought it to an end by calling security. Three burly guards promptly marched the *Mail* hackette out of the building.

AS spectators watched a gentlemanly game of cricket unfold on the second day of the Test between England and India at Headingley, an ungentlemanly spat was developing in the ground's press room.

Rumours abounded that *Mirror* hack Martin Rogers was pinching his rivals' stories by reading their laptop screens whenever they went for a break. So much bad feeling was generated that two tabloid hacks hatched a plot to catch Rogers out. They dreamt up a story about Mick Jagger offering to give £3m to Berkshire's minor cricket team to transform it into a top flight county side. The pair both wrote the hoax up and e-mailed it round several colleagues in the press box, then wandered back and forth during the course of play leaving their laptops unattended. Lo and behold the next day's *Mirror* carried a large "exclusive" by Martin Rogers. "Rock legend Sir Mick Jagger is set to bail out crisis county Yorkshire with a shock £3m investment," it read.

Evidently Rogers had fallen for the hoax but in his haste to nick his colleagues' stories before they returned had misread Berkshire as Yorkshire. Had Rogers pinned down Yorkshire cricket officials, or a representative of the rock star, he'd have learned the story was groundless. Instead the piece extensively quoted an "insider" apparently giving credence to the tale.

After bewildered Yorkshire locals learned on Saturday that Jagger was going to give their club an unexpected cash gift, the Yorkshire Evening Post eagerly followed it up. By Sunday there were red-faces all-round when the hoax was revealed.

WHEN is it not rude to be nude? No one's quite sure at the *Daily Mail*, where Victorian values stop just short of covering the piano legs.

In June 2000 the paper was foaming with righteous indignation at Channel 5's Naked season, which involved Keith Chegwin and others appearing on screen as nature intended. *Mail* writer Leo McKinstry took to the pulpit to denounce them: "This latest Channel 5 effort was no different from the soft-porn films about 'nudist camps' that used to be shown to the dirty mac brigade in the Fifties and Sixties…What is so scandalous is not just that this kind of titillation should be presented as social analysis but, even worse, that it should be beamed into homes at a time when children are watching television." Two years on, and the paper's inhibitions have been shed along with their clothes, as feature writer Oliver Bennett took his modesty in his hands to report from the world's only naturist town in the south of France.

Presumably the paper's defence to those readers of all ages who might have been put off their breakfast was that the two full-length pictures of Bennett which accompanied the article could under no circumstances ever be described as "titillation".

A BOY who stole £265 from his employers has told a court he is going to college and hopes to become an accountant.

Colchester Evening Gazette

IN HIS flagship "Diary of a Private Investor" column in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Edmund Jackson reported last week about how website www.citywire.co.uk helped to unearth undisclosed share buying in companies.

Strangely in delivering this free plug for Citywire, Jackson neglected to mention that his weekday job is as one of the dwindling band of writers at er... Citywire and that he also has share options in the company.

***DAILY Telegraph* readers who suffer from sleepwalking were no doubt excited to see a piece in the health section on 21 August, billed as "Bryony Gordon on the possible causes of somnambulism".**

Alas, much of the article turned out to be about celebs (including Jennifer Aniston and Elvis Presley) who have been sleepwalkers. The only reference to "possible causes" was a quote from the director of the Sleep Research Unit in Surrey – who revealed that, er, "we have no idea what causes sleepwalking".

Which leaves the other unanswerable question: what causes Bryony Gordon? The daughter of Sunday Mirror columnist Jane Gordon, she did a brief stint as a 3am Girl on the *Daily Mirror* but packed it in earlier this year, complaining that she was burned out at the ripe old age of 21. Rescue was at hand, however, with the offer of a feature-writer's job at the *Telegraph* – where, by happy coincidence, her aunt Sue Ryan is managing editor.

WHO could fail to be moved by Roy Greenslade's lengthy paean to the proletariat in the *Guardian* last week, in which the media pundit revealed that although he earns a six-figure salary he remains proud to be working-class?

Sadly, there was no room to mention one fine example of Roy's sense of working-class solidarity – his defiant crossing of the picket-line to continue production of the *Sun* after Murdoch's move to Wapping. Following Greenslade's recent apology to Arthur Scargill for smears published during his brief reign as editor of the *Daily Mirror*, can the printers, compositors, copy-typists, cleaners, librarians, catering staff and other workers who were sacked by the Dirty Digger now expect an apology from the great proletarian?

FORMER royal bodyguard Ken Wharfe delighted editors desperate for August copy with yet another book about Princess Di.

The tome contains very little new information - and what is new ain't really worth reading. Shame then that none of the extracts have mentioned the best bit - that the increasingly rotund ex-RPO was known to the young Prince William as "Mr Blobby".

"I'm afraid the doctor won't be able to see you until episode six"

HACKWATCH

Polly Toynbee

THE discovery by MORI that 35 to 54-year-olds are now "the grumpy generation" – aka Victor Meldrews – was celebrated by grumpy columnists such as Richard Littlejohn. But the chief prefect at Columnar Towers, Polly Toynbee, told the gloom-merchants to snap out of it.

"Everything is getting better," she declared: more money in most pockets, more jobs, more holidays, more shopping, lower crime, better hospitals and schools. "So why the Victor Meldrew nation? Why the grizzling, mizzling, whingeing, whining? Complaint seems to have become a national language. You hear it wherever you go..." Indeed you do. Perhaps this self-styled Pollyanna should reread some of her own *Grauniad* columns...

5 June: "So there goes the jubilee," Polly observes. "So in the past 25 years what progress has been made?" Bugger-all, apparently. Growing affluence has been "poisoned by the injustice of its distribution: it made people no happier because at the same time social cohesion and public collective goods were demolished... By chance the 1977 silver jubilee marked the year that Britain was more equal in how income was shared than at any time in history. It also marked the end of that social progress."

12 June: "To be sure, this government has its infuriating aspects," Polly whinges. "Cowardice, an endless ability to disappoint, to over-promise, to waver about with a wan beacon of belief." Even so, let's look on the bright side: it is "hardly the worst government of all time". Trebles all round!

14 June: But not for long. Polly is unimpressed by Tony Blair's enthusiasm for welfare-to-work policies. "The government will have to admit," she grumbles, "that simply pushing everyone into low-paid work will not solve the problem of Britain's still gigantic tide of poverty."

21 June: Polly has a fit of the grumps at Tony Blair's proposal that EU trade deals with poor countries should depend on their willingness to take back migrants. "His threats on aid and trade are a small-minded and unworthy response to what will become the great issue of the century, a shaming contribution to the European debate."

28 June: Midsummer's here, but Polly's mood is still far from sunny. "With Enron, Tyco, WorldCom and more to come, Wall Street's glorious decade collapses into a rotten parade of unsupervised greed." Not that Europe offers any better hope for the future: "How disjointed, petty and ill-tempered it looks, stumbling towards enlargement without vision."

3 July: Polly examines Labour's scheme to provide neighbourhood nurseries for women who want to find work. "It seems grudging to complain," she says, but does so anyway. "How is it all going? Not brilliantly... As fast as new places are being created, old ones are closing down."

10 July: Aggrieved council workers are going on strike, and Polly applauds their grievance. "The wonder is that it took this long," she moans. "How patiently the low paid have waited for Labour to redress the great injustice done to them over the preceding 20 years as their pay fell ever further behind the rest. It still widens..."

12 July: One of Polly's reasons to be cheerful is that most of us are getting richer and richer. "But that is not the whole picture," she adds glumly, surveying the crime figures. "Something else happens in good times. People have more money in their pockets, they go out more and their consumption of alcohol rises. The result? They hit each other more and personal violence figures rise. Exactly this is happening now..." In short, every silver lining has a cloud. What could be more Victor Meldrewish than that?

17 July: Another relentlessly optimistic *tour d'horizon*. "The last year has been a dismal, directionless muddle, the government emerging from the election with apparently no plan beyond winning," she writes. "It feels churlish to carp and cavil, but..." Cue yet more grizzling and mizzling.

23 August: Polly returns from holiday to learn that, following their one-day strike, low-paid council workers have won a 7.8 percent pay rise. Cause for rejoicing? Apparently not. "Some councils are threatening to privatise their services to avoid having to pay the extra money," she notes. "These threats... expose the harsh jungle the private sector has become in the last 20 years and how little Labour has done yet to put things right."

30 August: Two days after denouncing the Victor Meldrew syndrome and exhorting everyone to cheer up, Polly recalls Tony Blair's party-conference speech after 11 September last year, which happily envisaged a new age of global peace and prosperity. "From all of that there is, sadly, very little that he could repeat this year. For that brief moment, his speech captured an internationalist dream... But all that is blown away, every one of his hopes dashed... Sadly Tony Blair's great vision in last year's speech is long gone."

Oh dear. Whatever happened to Pollyanna the optimist? Her real model seems to be Mona Lott, the gloomy washerwoman from the radio comedy *ITMA*, whose mournful catchphrase never failed to raise a laugh: "It's being so cheerful as keeps me going."

HUMBUG SPECIAL

"AS bodyguard to the late Princess of Wales, Ken Wharfe got a taste for walking along sun-kissed beaches", thundered Richard Kay in the *Daily Mail* on 24 August. "To keep up the lifestyle he has betrayed her trust by selling a sordid memoir of her affairs and her instability." Kay's three page denouncement of the protection officer-turned-grass was accompanied by a picture of Wharfe on a French beach, taken by super-paparazzo Jason Fraser – precisely the sort of shot the *Daily Mail* swore blind it would never use again after Diana died all those years ago.

"It is breathtaking hypocrisy", thundered Kay on the *Mail*'s front page the following Tuesday. He was referring not to his own paper, but Wharfe again, in the third article he had managed to squeeze out of the scandal in as many days. Kay, of course, would never dream of profiting out of the life and death of the princess. His own partwork, *Diana: The Untold Story*, serialised interminably with the *Mail* in 1998 and then released as a book, was presumably bashed out in his spare time as a labour of love. As was his adaptation of Nick Davies' book *Diana: A Princess And Her Troubled Marriage*, cobbled together as a serialisation for the *Mail* in 1992 when the paper was outbid for Andrew Morton's tome. As was every one of the 1,000 or so articles that he has written about Diana for various papers around the world since her death in 1997.

Could Kay's pique at Wharfe be prompted by the fact that the book is co-written by his long-time rival royal correspondent at the *Express*, Robert Jobson? In the 4,000 or so words he has bashed out for the *Mail*, Kay has not found space to tell us. And while he lists at length the book's "sordid" and "shameful" claims about Diana's sex life, he doesn't mention another of Wharfe's revelations – that she only ended her long affair with James Hewitt because her privacy was invaded by a scurrilous hack by the name of, er, Richard Kay.

"AS part of a special commemorative series we present three very different personal views of how the world and the Royal Family has coped with the shock waves since her death.

In the first instalment... so long after her death, will the Princess of Wales ever be allowed to rest in peace?" *–The Express*

SO how will Tony and the team deal with the mutinous troops soon to gather for the TUC's annual jamboree - and a few weeks later the Labour Party Conference itself? White collar transport union, the TSSA, has submitted an emergency amendment on Iraq opposing military action, which seems likely to get passed by the brothers and sisters. The wording is bound to cause some consternation in Downing Street.

And while Blair has never been particularly bothered by what the TUC has had to say in the past, he is having to listen extremely carefully this time around. So much so that he has asked Jack Straw to act as the link man with the party and the unions on the ground, while he, the PM, deals directly with the President.

How this twin-track strategy will work is anyone's guess - but the grand plan of calming the brothers and sisters down over the autumn involves upping the ante shortly afterwards, when as expected Saddam refuses to allow the weapons inspectors back into Iraq.

MEANWHILE, as the TUC prepares to descend on Blackpool, union chiefs are showing growing impatience with party chairman, Charles "Fatty" Clarke.

They are once more expected to pick up Labour's bills now it is saddled with a £6m debt, but are not prepared to put up with Clarke's hectoring ways for much longer. The big man never did have much time for the brothers, even when acting as Neil Kinnock's chief of staff, but his tirades against John Edmonds of the GMB have been of such ferocity that some are privately battling for a more amenable chairman, such as Peter Hain.

His removal could presage more changes fostered by the unions, who are cock-a-hoop that Labour has to depend on them once again. One such would be the removal of the Dear Leader's Downing Street adviser on trade unions, the former Unison official, Nita Clark. The brothers have long thought that Ms Clark has gone native and want her shifted before they write out any more cheques.

ARTS For Labour is a voluntary group which for the past 30 years has organised well-known faces off the telly to appear on Labour election platforms and to endorse obscure election candidates in the hope of increasing coverage in local newspapers, radio and TV.

Actors who have traipsed up-and-down the land at their own expense to help Labour include Alan Rickman, Juliet Stephenson, Patrick Stewart, Prunella Scales, Bill Owen, Ricky Tomlinson and Sue Johnston, as well as half the casts of The Bill and Coronation Street. Every year, AFL has a stall at the Labour Party conference, which provides opportunities for Labour MPs to be photographed being chummy with assorted movie and soap stars. However, this year's free publicity has been put at jeopardy by some dimwitted Old Queen Street wunderkind who has telephoned the organisation and demanded a £500 fee for the previously free conference pitch. Negotiations are still proceeding, with the luvvies considering hitting back by charging Labour's ungrateful members £50 per plug.

ACCORDING to The Times, Iain Duncan Smith's planners have a brilliant new wheeze for pulling in the votes of young people.

It is based on a "top target seats" strategy in which university cities such as Oxford and Cambridge figure highly. It would appear to be something of a triumph of hope over experience, however, given that in Cambridge in June 2001 the Tories slumped to third place behind Labour and the Lib Dems, as they did in Oxford East. In Oxford West, Lib Dem MP Evan Harris increased his majority to more than 9,000 over the Conservatives and in the May 2002 local elections the Tories lost their last toehold on Oxford city council.

If these are the "top target" seats, the list of long shots must make even more interesting reading!

Archer is believed to be worth between £50 and £60 million

Mail On Sunday

SCOTLAND's rural affairs and environment minister Ross Finnie is accused of caring more for big business than for the interests of Scotland's environment and natural heritage. But that couldn't be true... could it?

One million Scottish farm salmon were killed in August by globetrotting jellyfish. These clever little creatures, we are told, had swum all the way from the Pacific, via the Panama Canal, just to feast on fake Atlantic salmon. The dead fish were recovered for pulping into fishmeal for use in animal feed.

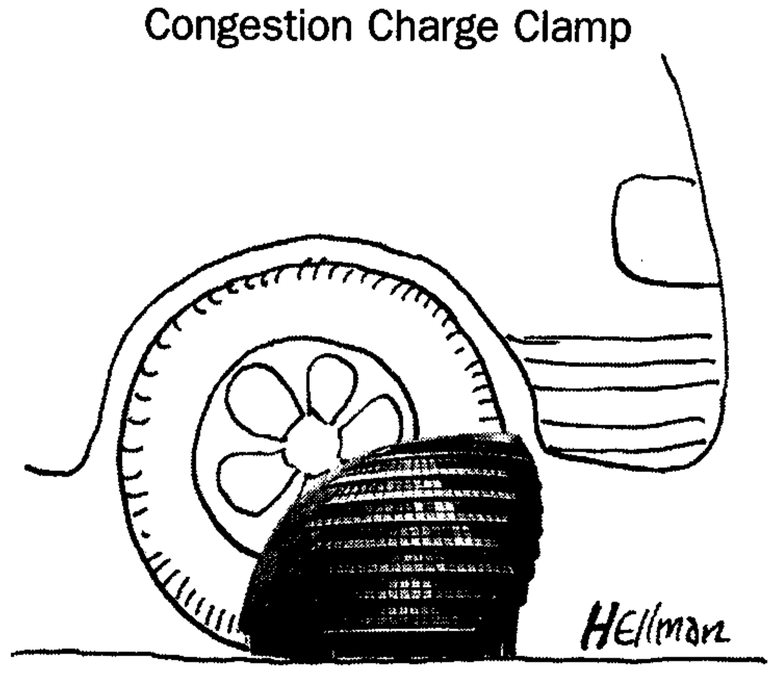
Two weeks later, however, the BBC reported a half-mile long slick of dead salmon, consisting of hundreds of thousands of rotting fish, bobbing about on The Minch. The Scottish environmental protection agency (Sepa) warned the public to "stay away from the slick in case the fish proved to be toxic".

By the next day, however, the fish farmers and their government quango chums had got their act together and the story changed: the dead fish were simply leftovers from the jellyfish attack. Murdo Mackay, local manager of one of the companies involved, explained that while cleaning up the mess, some corpses had been missed. When these decomposing fish resurfaced, they naturally attracted seagulls, giving the impression of a large slick over a wide area.

Petter Krabberod, managing director of the Norwegian company Stolt Sea Farms, said there were only "about 300" fish, not hundreds of thousands, in the slick. A Sepa spokeswoman confirmed this while vigorously denying any suggestion that toxins were to blame. Throughout this charade, Ross Finnie remained silent.

101 Uses for a City Hall

Congestion Charge Clamp



DURING its brief but rather torrid existence, the UK Independence Party has gone through four leaders in 10 years. So popular is the post that members are now being charged for the pleasure of seeking it.

A bulletin inviting nominations for the 2002 leadership election demands a deposit of £250 from every candidate, refundable only if he or she gets more than 5 percent of first-choice votes. Members have searched the constitution for any reference to this novel fund-raising tactic, but can find no mention of it in the rulebook.

Another post which has proved very popular in UKIP is that of press secretary. Bemused members have lost count of the number of incumbents so far, but they include one man who sued the party for unfair dismissal and made wild allegations about infiltration by MI5. Now the latest occupant, Mark Croucher, may soon be heading for the door after posting the following reply to a message on UKIP's Eurofaq chat-site: "Oh look. Racism, xenophobia and sexism all in one message, along with the fevered imaginations of a pubescent mind. You really are doing yourselves proud. You'll get along fine in the Tories. If you like little boys too, have a word with..." He then names a very senior old Conservative.

Since he is the paid spokesman for UKIP, members are assuming this represents the party's official view.

SO who has it in for Henry McLeish, the dreary former government minister who stepped into Donald Dewar's shoes as Scotland's first minister after his death?

McLeish is still being investigated by Inspector Knacker after it was discovered that he had sub-let part of his Westminster constituency office, but had none the less recently been re-selected by his local constituency to run for the Scottish parliament the next time around. But McLeish hadn't reckoned on hatchet-faced MP, Rosemary McKenna who presides over the selection panel for Labour candidates.

"Everyone is asked is there anything in your past that could embarrass the party," she told local members. "McLeish said that there was nothing. That will need to be re-visited. He must have lied to the interviewing panel or he may have given some kind of explanation to them."

Either way Henry McLeish last week graciously fell on his sword and announced that he would not now be standing for the Scottish parliament after all.

I-SPY

HAVING made a success of rail maintenance (cf the Potters Bar derailment), private contractor Jarvis is trying to make its mark in education too.

At the University of York it is busy revamping the campus and has put up lots of signs announcing the fact. "Jarvis Site Staff Only – No Unorthorrised Access".

Perhaps Jarvis workers ought to go back to school rather than bid for contracts to build and run them.

'Backbiter'

LACK OF ENERGY

OF all the weeks when it might have been a bright idea to underline the government's commitment to renewable energy... a pioneering £30m biomass project has been scuppered at the 11th hour by Kelda's (aka Yorkshire Water) decision to sell off its green energy division.

The first casualty of the sale to Energy Power Resources Ltd (EPRL) has been the flagship Arbre Project, a willow-burning power station near Selby, Yorkshire, the first of its kind in Europe, which was due to go into full production next year, supplying 10 megawatts to the National Grid – enough to power 35,000 homes.

Arbre was put into liquidation last month with the loss of 40 jobs at the plant and leaving 55 farmers, who had battled willow bugs and weeds and signed 16-year contracts to supply wood-chip fuel, wondering what to do with acres upon acres of willow coppice.

Now Selby's Labour MP, John Grogan is spearheading calls for an inquiry into the decision to pull the plug on the scheme which has attracted about £10m in EU and taxpayers' money and which is viewed as crucial to meeting government targets of 10 per cent renewable energy by 2010.

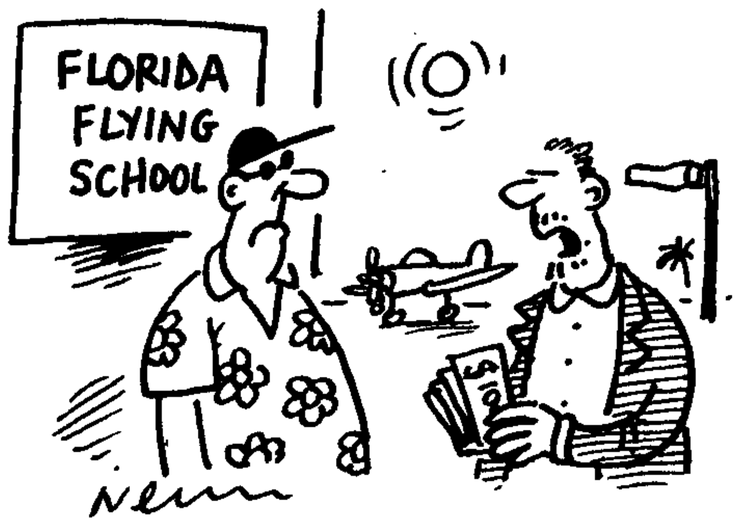
Grogan, who firmly believes the plant is viable, says Kelda's deal with EPRL "leaves a nasty taste in the mouth". Arbre was doomed it seems when Kelda decided to concentrate on its core water and waste management interests and sold off its renewable energy generation business, First Renewables, to EPRL.

At first it looked like a good sale: EPRL was already into chicken-litter power in Scotland and straw-to-energy at Ely in Cambridgeshire. But it seems the £25m deal involved a promise by Kelda to fund Arbre until test production next year and involved EPRL buying up £20m of Arbre's debts. A get-out clause enabled Kelda to pull the plug if it felt the project would not be technically or economically viable. Just two months later, and despite several years of commitment, it did just that.

Now heavily investing in the US – this year a reported £163m acquisition of four New England water companies – Kelda was not prepared to cough up the final £3m to see the plant into production.

EPRL, which had taken on 89.5 per cent of the company, came to the same conclusion and called in the liquidators. But the debt that EPRL bought makes it principal creditor – leaving the farmers and workers high and dry.

Their only hope lies in the other 10.5 percent shareholder, the Swedish technology company firm TPS, which is working with MPs and MEPs to try and put together a consortium to buy the company out. Unless they succeed or the government intervenes the damage to the future of biomass crops and energy in the future could be terminal.



"I'd like to do a crash course"

THE MMR story continues with one study suggesting a link with autism and bowel disease, another rejecting it; with claim and counterclaim – and still no clear answers for anxious parents.

But at last the government agreed to examine autistic and bowel-diseased children by funding a £300,000 study by the National Institute for Biological Standards and Controls (NIBSC) to see if it can replicate work started by the Royal Free Hospital suggesting that there might be a link with MMR.

The trouble – as other publications have already pointed out – is that two of the key researchers at the institute, Dr Phil Minor and Dr Muhammed Afzal, have been advising the defendant drug companies or their legal teams, in the parents' action for vaccine damages. From the parents' prospective it looks like the government are simply helping to fund the defence. Especially as Dr Minor, an expert virologist who has been helping GlaxoSmithKline, was one of the first to suggest the latest US study suggesting a link between autism and the vaccine might be flawed.

Last month Vijendra Singh, a scientist at Utah University, reported in full (*Eyes passim*) in the *Journal of Biomedical Science* his latest work suggesting autism may be an auto-immune reaction to an infectious agent. His team analysed blood from 125 autistic children and 92 "control children" and found a "significant increase" in MMR antibodies in the autistic children. In 75 of the autistic children, they found an unusual anti-body linked to the measles virus, but not to mumps or rubella; and 90 percent of the autistic children who had measles antibodies also had myelin basic protein antibodies – ie, suggesting that the measles vaccine may be causing an auto-immune reaction where the body attacks the insulating sheath that protects nerve fibres. "Stemming from this evidence we suggest that an inappropriate antibody response to MMR, specifically the measles component, might be related to the pathogenesis of autism," concluded the researchers.

When details of the NIBSC study were announced shortly after Singh's paper, Dr Minor immediately suggested the antibodies picked up in American study could instead have been against human seroalbumin, which is used to stabilise the MMR vaccine.

But along with other criticism from our public health officials Singh was unimpressed. He told a US autism newsletter: "Simply ask them what new laboratory-based research they have done to discredit my research. The answer will be none."

Andrew Wakefield, the gastro-enterologist at the Royal Free who first raised the alarm does not share the parents' pessimism about the new work. "I am pleased that at last the government is looking to see what is happening to the children."

Police are using a severed finger found at the scene of a bungled break-in to track a burglar... They are using DNA from the digit to track the thief, who left empty-handed.

Ceefax, 23/7/02

Warballs

"I have hardly been back in the office since the spring/summer shows and here we are debating the creative direction for autumn/winter 2002. It's a tough call: 11 September has transformed everything. How will people view fashion in the future? Too frivolous? After much debate we call our directive for autumn 'Alive!'"

— Susanne Tide-Frater, *Vogue*.

"Hayes said that he would not be featuring elaborate stage designs, props or costume changes on his new tour. 'I think that after 11 September people are searching for something a bit more real and a bit more stripped back,' he said. 'That is why I think rock'n'roll is coming back in a big way – people like that raw, honest material.'"

— Darren Hayes, ex-singer with Australian band Savage Garden, on entertainment.news.com.

"The only way that I know how to define a hero, of which there are few these days, is to let myself be consumed. Phil consumes me with an aura symbolic of the fire-fighters from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. With eyes of sheer determination and hope, Phil forgets about all the tabloid write-ups and plays golf the way it was meant to be played."

— Tribute on the homepage of professional golfer Phil Mickelson.

"Such strong contributions by marketing to business performance are to be applauded. At-home consumption of lagers also leapt immediately after the events of 11 September in the US. In an uncertain political and economic world that contribution deserves greater recognition."

— Editorial in *Marketing* magazine.

"But just how do pervs view our changing world, especially after the events of 11 September? Has the sense many of us have that the outside world is now a much scarier place had any significant impact on our internal politics or our enthusiasm for the pursuit of the kinky life?"

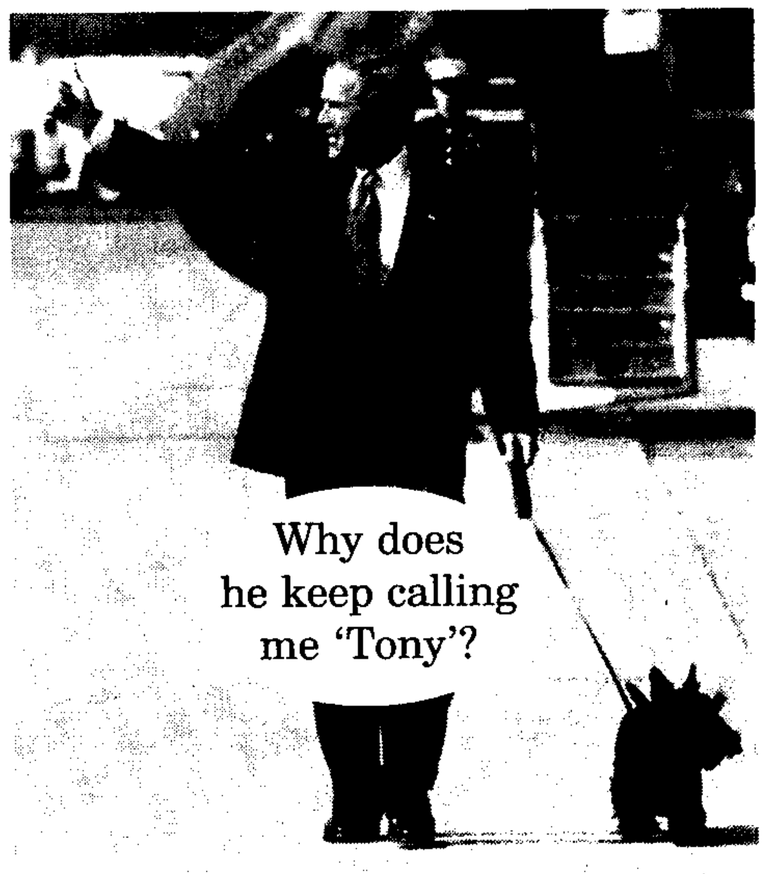
— *Skin Two* fetish magazine.

"Re Mini Babybel. Bel have had directive from their head office requesting they do not advertise on 11 September. Please can you make sure we have no spots go out on this day."

— Message to ITV companies from ad agency for Babybel cheese.

"Since 11 September, sensitivity has been the watchword for all decisions made by the Stilton Cheese Makers' Association."

— Website of Stilton Cheese Makers' Association.



Number crunching

SAVING THE WORLD

£50 million a year

■ Amount pledged by UK government at Earth Summit in export credit guarantees to encourage renewable energy options

£1.7 billion last year

■ Amount pledged by UK government in export credit guarantees to encourage arms sales

I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here! (ITV)

IT HASN'T been a great year for ITV. It has lost its audience (now nudging 20 percent). It has lost its Liddiment. And gradually, and wilfully, it has squandered what was left of its tattered credibility.

Thursday 29 August 2002 may end up being the date we all remember; the date ITV's wheels finally fell off. For on Thursday 29 August 2002, this was the mid-evening line-up on Britain's first and, for nearly 50 years, favourite commercial channel:

9:00 *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!*

10:30 *Britain's Sexiest Builders*

11:00 *The Campest Men In Britain (Not Including David Liddiment)*

At least we now know why he "resigned" when he did. Determined to slag off Greg Dyke for dumbing down the BBC, he had to make his play before anyone could notice what his own channel was showing on Thursday 29 August 2002. A low-rent celebrity form of *Survivor*. Drab, sniggering catwalk exhibitionism. And loads of wrinkled old roarers. No wonder the airports are packed. And noose sales are well up, for all those left behind.

I'm A Celebrity... is the centrepiece of this schedule, occupying well over 40,000 hours of screen time — or at least, it feels like it. Ant and Dec — who else? — have been sent to northern Australia to snigger and chuckle as eight G-list celebs try to rough it in the jungle for a couple of weeks. When the idea was first mooted, the production team probably sat down and made a list of the people they'd like to get on the show. Bill Clinton, perhaps. Madonna. Marlon Brando. The Pope. Several thousand phone-calls to agents later, they have ended up with Tony Blackburn, Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, Neil Hamilton's wife and that man with the teeth who used to present *You Bet*.

They are not an attractive proposition. Indeed, one of the main reasons for watching is in the slight but realistic hope that something unpleasant might happen to one of them. The jungle is full of creepy-crawlies that bite, sting, crush or kill. It's a nasty place. And with this lot there, it's just that little bit nastier.

So far, though, the celebs have lived down to expectations. "As we go in, the jungle will get thicker and thicker and thicker," warned Rob, the local guide. As it happens, the same has applied to Tara Palmer-Tomkinson.

"I'm a viewer! Get me out of here!"

"I have never, ever, in my whole life, touched a worm," she says before the first Bush Tucker Trial, which she has been voted to undergo by a cruel public. "And now I'm going to have probably a billion worms, all alive, on my head." Later on some of her fellow celebs complain because she is not pulling her weight in the camp, but instead goes around impersonating a bunny rabbit.

Uri Geller (for it is he) gives her a big encouraging hug, before giving all the other women big encouraging hugs. He has promised not to use any of his psychic powers during the series, which is kind. "Don't talk about snakes. Let's not talk about snakes," says Christine Hamilton, talking about snakes. "This is the one moment not to talk about snakes." Sadly she never actually stops talking at all.

Nigel Benn has retired from boxing, but exercises with a full bag of chips on each shoulder every morning. Every argument ends with him threatening to hit someone. And there are lots of arguments. Rhona Cameron (leftie lesbian comic) and Darren Day (showbiz teeth man) detest each other with a passion, which is about the only interesting thing to have happened so far. Tony Blackburn, meanwhile, wanders around in a bit of a daze, while viewers at home sit in shock, as that really turns out to be his hair.

Celebrity Big Brother had the simple but effective *Big Brother* format to support it, and it only lasted four days. Greedy ITV has extended this particular experiment to two long miserable weeks, with endless updates and "unseen" supplements on unwatched ITV2. But it makes for dreary viewing. The celebs bicker and look terrible and have to endure sadistic Bush Tucker Trials, but there's nothing else for them to do.

Still, it hasn't bothered viewers. The show has hovered between six and seven million viewers during its run so far. Last Thursday, however, ratings soared to over eight million. What caused the sudden surge? Uri Geller being forced to eat live maggots. Remind me who, in his MacTaggart lecture one year ago, said "The soul of British television is in danger... We are losing sight of the innate value of programmes in our fixation on the success that can be measured by profit, profile or performance." But then as bookies shorten the odds on who'll make it through the jungle, David Liddiment (for it was he) has already been voted out.

'Couch Potato'

MEDIA NEWS

BBC reporter Jacky Rowland's decision to testify against Slobodan Milosevic at The Hague has raised eyebrows at BBC news.

Her "exclusive" report for *Newsnight* was a monument to crassness. "I feel great. It was great. It was pretty fantastic – once I got into it I was on a roll," she said to camera, sounding as though she'd just appeared on *The Weakest Link* rather than at a war crimes tribunal investigating 153 deaths at the Dubrava prison.

Moreover, 34 international media organisations concerned for the safety of their own reporters had just presented the court with a document explaining why it might be a bad idea for hacks to turn prosecution witness: "Forcing journalists to testify against their sources (confidential or otherwise) will make future sources more hesitant to talk to the press, particularly in war zones," it said, pointing out the bleeding obvious.

Among the signatories on the document were CNN, Associated Press and… Rowland's bosses at the BBC.

STAFF at BBC online have no doubt where their priorities lie. When departing ITV boss David Liddiment accused the corporation of being too ratings-driven, they gave director-general Greg Dyke's scornful response top billing on their entertainment news page.

The second most important story of the day was that drama 24 had pulled nearly 3 million viewers for its final episode the night before.

THERE were many who cheered when Channel 4 boss Mark Thompson used his MacTaggart Lecture to condemn British broadcasters for producing "dull, mechanical and samey television".

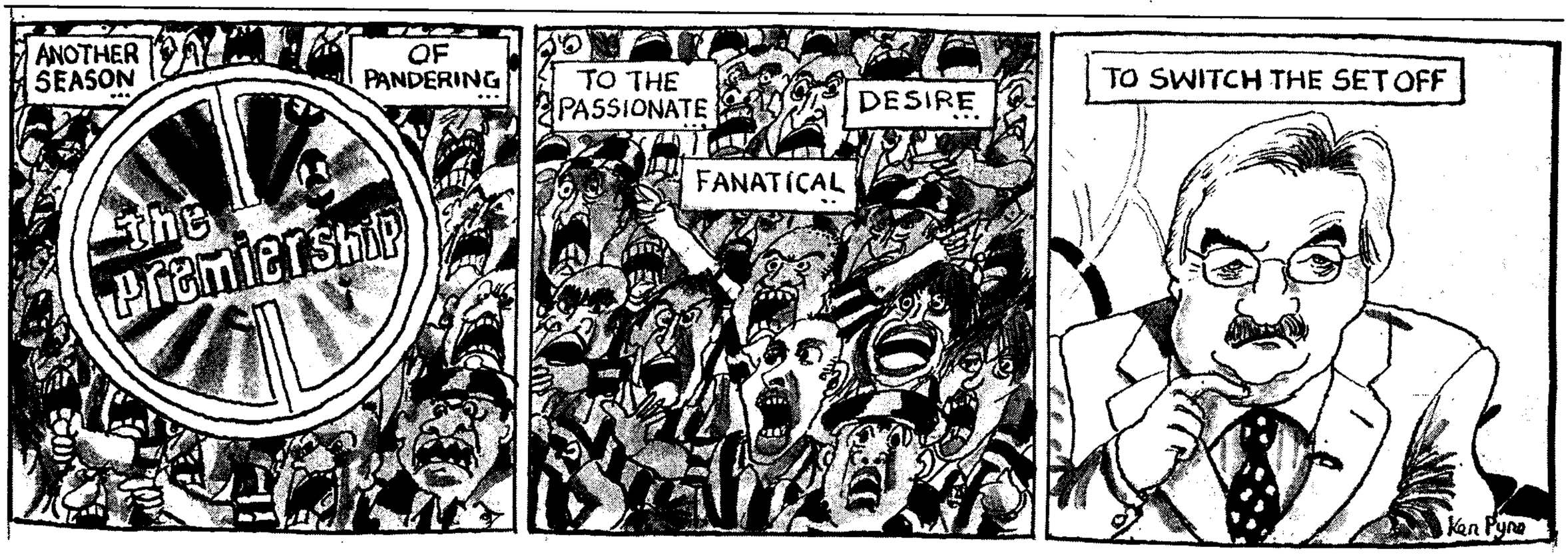
He's right, of course – as this recent schedule from the digital BBC Choice demonstrates:

7pm Liquid News **7.30** Robot Wars **8.15** Rock Shrines **8.30** Soap Phone In **9** Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps **9.30** Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps **10** Eastenders **10.30** The Job **10.50** The Job **11.15** New Comedy Awards **11.45** Tales of Uplift and Moral Improvement **12am** Liquid News **12.30** Soap Phone In **1** Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps **1.30–2am** Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps.

And who was one of the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for this and other BBC digital albatrosses? Step forward former director of television at the BBC… Mark Thompson.

POOR Sara Cox. Two years on the early shift for the breakfast show at Radio One have left her unable to tell what time of day it is.

Justifying her newly raised £200,000 salary last week, she told hacks: "I have the biggest morning show for the youth audience in the country… I'm doing a good job at the end of the day."



"These days all the people the bride has slept with sit this side – and all the people the bridegroom has slept with sit that side"

THE BBC's publicity for serial-killer thriller *Messiah 2* gloated over the programme's gore, gleefully promising "15 horrific deaths" to delight bank holiday audiences. In the event, the corporation decided the week that the bodies of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman were discovered was the wrong time to broadcast the show, and it was pulled from the schedules.

But there were no such qualms over at pay-per-view channel FilmFour, which happily broadcast *Under Suspicion*, a film which features the discovery of the corpse of a 12-year-old girl wearing a red football shirt, and the subsequent interrogation of her suspected killer, on the very night that Ian Huntley was charged with the girls' murders.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link Fashion Special, BBC1

Anne Robinson: What man-made structure built during the 3rd century BC is often said to be visible from space?
Fashion person: The Millennium Dome.
AR: What is a divertimento - an Italian road sign or a piece of music?
Fashion person: An Italian road sign.

The Weakest Link Eligible Bachelor Special, BBC1

Robinson: What is a singlet, a bachelor or a vest?
Eligible bachelor: A bachelor.
Robinson: How many of his wives did Henry VIII divorce?
Eligible bachelor: Eight.
Robinson: Simon, what means faithfulness in a relationship and is also a term used in sound reproduction?
Eligible bachelor (*after long pause*): Dolby.

AD NAUSEAM

OPINIONS differ in the aviation industry on how to show due deference on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America.

In Britain, Virgin Atlantic and British Airways are again trying to outdo each other in teary-eyed solemnity by trumpeting that they will cease all marketing activity for a two-week period around 11 September. Over there, however, the "Concert for America", broadcast on NBC to commemorate those who died, is being sponsored by Boeing.

THREE weeks after its inception, a new campaign for Pot Noodles asking consumers to "Hurt me you slag" has now been banned from every advertising medium in existence. Because poster advertising is regulated by advertisers and not pre-vetted, however, the posters still went up in the first place, whereupon the complaints flooded in and the Advertising Standards Authority ordered them to be taken down again.

Ad Nauseam has often argued that letting ad agencies regulate their own output is like giving kids the car keys. Under the current system it is plain good business sense to get an ad banned, as it creates a media furore and gives brands much sought-after yoof appeal. If proof were needed, since the let's-take-porn-mainstream campaign began, sales of Pot Noodle have gone through the roof. The government might want to consider cases like this when it decides whether or not to make TV and broadcast advertising self-regulatory as well under the forthcoming communications bill.

WHILE defacing adverts is an act of vandalism in no way to be encouraged, it has to be said that so called "subvertising" is becoming adroit to the point where the original ads seem lacklustre by comparison.

Last week a reader spotted an embellishment to a Virgin Mobile ad, which illustrates the slogan "Don't stay together for the wrong reasons" with supposedly amiable doggerel like "Her name is Leigh, she smells of Brie, she failed her degree, but she's a 32DD". To this, some wag had added: "His name is Branson, he's not very handsome, his adverts are tiresome and he fucks with his pants on."

Oh, Yeah?

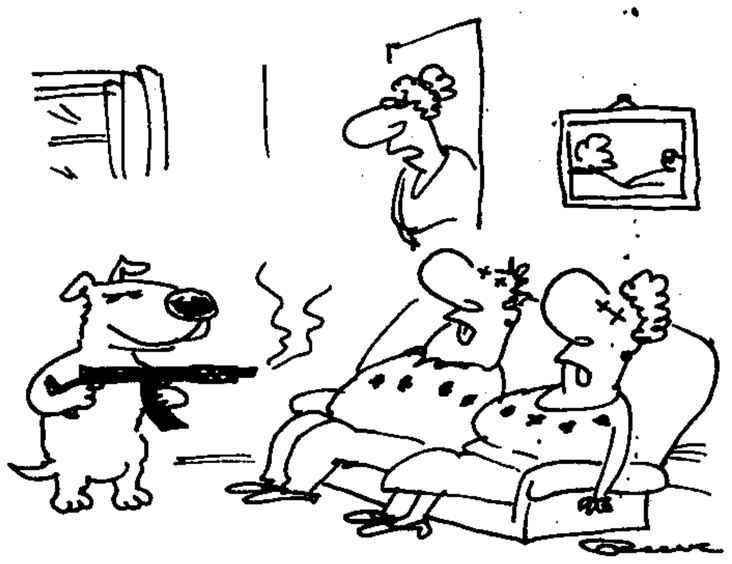
***PRIVATE EYE* has long called me "Sue MacGhastly" in its media spoofs because it is alleged I once took too much of an interest in the casualty figures in a train crash. That sort of grisly information, the implication was, was boys' business.**

– Sue MacGregor interviewed in *The Independent*

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Pearl & Dean Martin



"Bad dog!"

Plugged In

"THE New Archbishop of Canterbury proves himself The Simpsons' No1 fan yesterday as he accepts a Bart and Homer goodie box from *The Sun*.

We handed videos, T-shirts and caps to Dr Rowan Williams, 52 – dubbed the Bartbishop due to his love of the Sky One cartoon…

Ex-US President George Bush snr has appeared in the show, whose maker Fox is owned by News Corporation, *The Sun*'s parent company."

– Spiritual World Exclusive, The Sun; 25 July.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

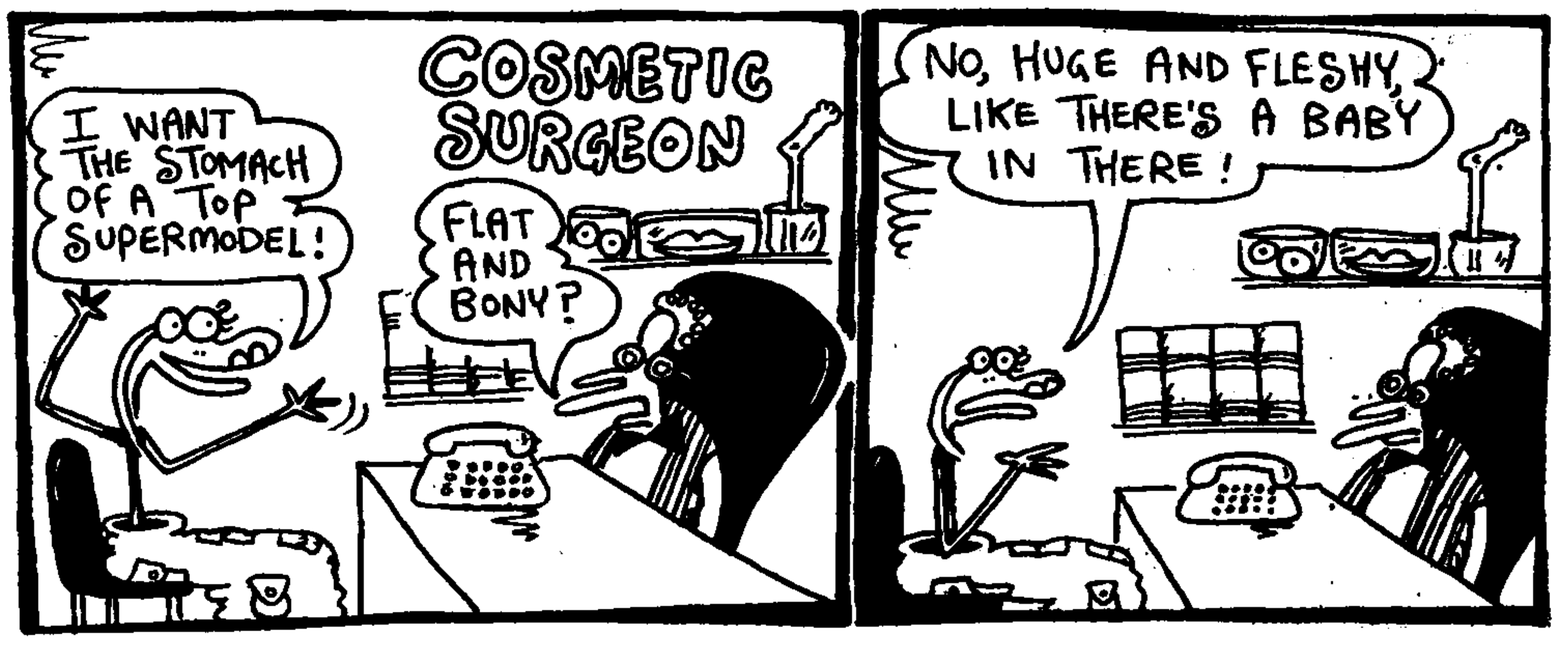
The departure of Steve Morrison as chief executive of Granada is yet another example of nothing succeeding like failure. Granada shares are a third of what they were two years ago helped by the ITV Digital fiasco.

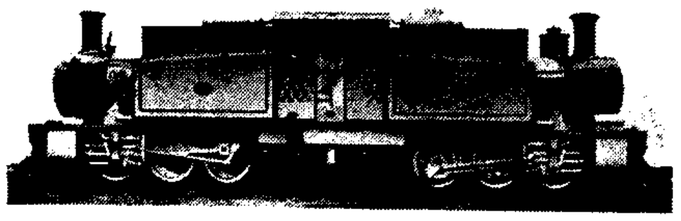
Morrison and his organ grinder Charles Allen have presided over a major demolition of shareholder value. So Morrison the monkey will be rewarded for loyally taking the fall for his boss with a generous pay-off, maybe up to £500,000 and a pension of £304,000 a year.

Not bad for a protégé of Lord "Gus" Macdonald who joined Granada in the Seventies as an eager filmmaker campaigning for the homeless and against rich property speculators by recording the occupation of London's then empty Centre Point office block. Like his patron he has long ago abandoned such juvenile social concerns to concentrate on what really matters – ambition and money.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER





SIGNAL FAILURES

Virgin Dross-country

THE official reason for poor punctuality on the railway is that its creaking infrastructure has too many trains. Richard Branson knows all about that.

Branson's Cross-country franchise is normally bottom of the punctuality league (only 62.5 percent of the trains arrived on time in 2001-02); but he has a solution: this month Virgin Cross-country (VC) will shorten its trains and, er, double its services.

In theory VC's new timetable is a big improvement, offering the same services every two hours and easy connections between them. In practice it will be a shambles if the official analysis of unreliability is correct.

The principle used by Virgin isn't new. British Rail converted many routes to short, frequent trains in the 1980s, and Swiss timetables have been reshaped so services repeat every hour (and not always with shorter trains). But the routes BR converted were less crowded than lines used by VC are today.

Birmingham New Street, hub of the VC franchise, is already one of Britain's most congested stations and the chief local service will increase by 50pc on the day VC's trains double. VC covers a bigger territory than any other franchise and is especially prone to delays on crowded commuter lines in the south and on parts of the west-coast mainline where renewal work is dragging on.

The Swiss invested heavily in infrastructure for their revamped timetable, but Railtrack has made only minor changes – like restoring a disused platform at Bristol – for VC's new schedules. Railtrack spurned the chance to enlarge Birmingham New Street's cramped east end in 1999 (*Eye* 992), although it was well aware of Virgin's plans. In Warwickshire VC trains have just one track for both directions for 10 miles.

VC is hiring a fleet of new Voyager trains of just four carriages each, about half as many as previous trains on the same routes. It chose slimline seats, harder than BR's old-fashioned cushions, and packed them close for intimacy. Voyagers are so advanced a breakdown can affect the entire train. In July passengers were stuck for five hours on a failed Voyager where the air conditioning and toilet flushes went on strike in sympathy.

Manchester's transport authority predicts a big drop in the overall number of seats on VC services from this month – 43.7 percent fewer on trains to Manchester from the south. At the busiest times Virgin may have to lay on vans to carry passengers' luggage by road.

Virgin, though, should be quids in whether the new timetable works or not. If the network can't cope, that's Railtrack's fault for accepting Virgin's timetable plan without upgrading infrastructure and Railtrack's successor – publicly funded Network Rail – will compensate Virgin for delays.

PS: Although the VC franchise is running largely to plan, the strategic rail authority (SRA) is giving it £66m of public cash on top of the original £57m subsidy to ensure Virgin Trains doesn't make a loss. That £66m, and a top-up next year which could exceed £100m, might otherwise be spent enhancing infrastructure to reduce delays and compensation payments to VC.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

WHY won't "new" Labour update the law on embryology? Parliamentary debate around amendments to the 12-year-old human fertilization and embryology (HFE) act has been repeatedly refused, leaving the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) in a constant state of conflict and litigation from pro-life groups and aggrieved parents denied treatment.

As the HFEA itself puts it: "New, clearer legislation is desperately needed that takes into account the massive scientific advances that have taken place since the last act was drafted, and is less open to misinterpretation."

The inadequacies of current legislation are highlighted by the HFEA's judgments on two children: Ben Whittaker and Zaim Hashmi. They have very similar conditions of equivalent severity and could have their lives saved by essentially the same technique. Yet only Zaim has been allowed treatment.

Ben has Diamond Blackfan Anaemia, a rare and eventually fatal disease curable only by a bone marrow transplant from a matched donor. His parents have been denied permission to have in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and pre-implantation embryo screening. Such screening could have ensured that a subsequent child born would be an exact match for Ben and his or her cord blood could be used to provide the bone marrow transplant. Zaim has a different life-limiting anaemia, but his parents have been allowed to have IVF treatment and then to screen the embryos for tissue typing prior to implantation so that a sibling would be born whose cord blood could be used to treat and hopefully cure Zaim.

The different decisions have not been made on the effectiveness of the treatment or the impact on others but on the basis of the precise genetic classification of the diseases under the current legislation. Although Ben could be helped by the processes of tissue typing of sibling embryos, his anaemia is not inherited in the same way as Zaim's, and his treatment is currently not lawful.

The HFEA's own ethics committee reported on 22 November 2001 that "the technique should also be available where there is an existing sibling with a life-threatening but non-inherited condition"; but the report has mysteriously been removed from the HFEA website and its most recent guidelines published on 13 December state that screening and selection can only take place if the embryos in question have a significant (ie inherited) risk of being affected by the same condition. This is not the case with Ben: he just needs the cord blood of a sibling with an exact bone marrow match.

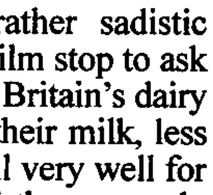
The HFEA insists that sticking to these rules means that its decisions are lawful and ethical as the law stands. But before the HFEA disappears under the weight of human rights litigation, parliament and the public should be allowed to debate whether amendments are needed to this increasingly outdated legislation.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

DOWN ON THE FARM



AT a time when hundreds of UK dairy farmers are going out of business every month, it made journalistic sense for Channel Four to produce a 75-minute documentary on the crisis called *Milk Wars*. But it broadcast the programme at 6.30pm on a hot Saturday evening in August and showed yet again why the British media are wholly incapable of understanding the disaster engulfing Britain's countryside.

The film turned out to be a fly-on-the-wall documentary about how, two years ago, dairy farmer David Handley led his Farmers for Action guerrilla campaign against the supermarkets which eventually blossomed into the fuel blockades of September 2000 (the subject of a second film shown a week later). We were treated to endless voyeuristic shots of Handley shouting down telephones or addressing unhappy knots of his fellow farmers in the middle of the night as they blockaded supermarket depots. The film turned the farmers' campaign into soap opera, with an intimate view of the strain on Handley's marriage as his poor wife grappled with mounting bills and ever fiercer letters from the bank.

This might have passed for rather sadistic entertainment. But not once did the film stop to ask why it was all happening. Why were Britain's dairy farmers getting only 14p a litre for their milk, less than the cost of production? It was all very well for Handley himself to carry on as if those greedy supermarkets were the only villains, grinding British farmers into the ground to maximise their own profits. But why were the supermarkets able to buy milk so much more cheaply elsewhere? Any idea that the role of journalism might be to ask such basic questions didn't even arise.

Had the film-makers shown an ounce of curiosity it might not have taken them more than 15 seconds to discover that the chief reason the price British farmers receive for their milk is so low is that the supermarkets can buy milk at giveaway prices from Ireland and the continent. Which immediately raises the next question: why, if the Irish and French farmers operate under the same common agricultural policy as their British competitors, can they apparently produce their milk so much more cheaply, even though, on average, British dairy herds are 30 percent more productive than those elsewhere in the European Union?

There is no great secret about the answer. Firstly, as this column last reported back in April, it is because the EU-wide milk price is set in euros. The devaluation of the euro has thus in the past three years given the euroland farmers a hefty price advantage. Secondly, thanks to the Brussels milk quota system, the continental and Irish farmers have huge surpluses which they can afford to offload into Britain at knockdown prices. Thirdly, the Irish, French, German and Belgian farmers have governments which do everything they can to assist them, while our government does the opposite.

Our competitors make full use of the Brussels intervention system which guarantees farmers a minimum price for their milk, while British ministers refuse to sign up for intervention because they are quite happy to see our smaller dairy farmers go to the wall. None of this is any mystery – except to television film-makers, the farmers themselves and of course their supposed leaders in the National Farmers' Union. But as usual the truth is too boring to report. Much better stick to soap opera.

'Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

A DON DEAL

LABOUR's eagerness to please the great god Football has led the Scottish executive to award itself special powers to allow football stadiums to be built on greenbelt land in support of Scotland's bid to co-host the Euro 2008 football championships with Ireland.

One 30,000-seat stadium has been earmarked for farmland in the Kingswells area on the outskirts of Aberdeen, where hundreds of residents have protested to the council. Their views have been sidelined by Aberdeen city council, which claims that the "silent majority" is in favour.

The £30m development, which will also include a go-kart track, driving ranges and an olympic-sized swimming pool, would provide a new home for Aberdeen football club, whose chairman, Stewart Milne, is boss of one of Scotland's biggest developers, the Stewart Milne Group. SMG has an option to buy the land on which the Dons' new stadium would be built. Should it go ahead, SMG says it would transfer the land to Aberdeen FC at cost price.

One of those most enthusiastic about the stadium development has been Labour city councillor David Maitland. Days before the planning committee met to decide the issue, he began lobbying fellow councillors to vote in favour. He told one Lib Dem that if he didn't vote the right way he could forget any hopes of getting a new leisure centre in his ward; another was told his business interests could suffer. A third taped his conversation with Maitland.

The councillors concerned complained to Aberdeen's chief legal officer, Crawford Langley, who found there had been a "blatant and unjustified" attempt to interfere with the planning process. Maitland resigned and a file was sent to Inspector McKnacker. Langley, however, ruled that the planning process had not been fatally compromised and allowed a vote on the stadium to go ahead. It was duly passed.

● **WITH stress levels rising in the safe Labour haven of Barking and Dagenham after backbench councillors rejected a claim by senior officers for a 9 percent-plus-inflation pay rise (*Eye* 1061), "improvement and development manager" Naomi Goldberg is doing her bit to ease the tension. Goldberg, who reports to the council's £117,264 pa chief executive Graham "club class" Farrant, has submitted a bid for £70,000 of office improvements, including the creation of a "chill out zone" furnished with new-agey beanbags for the exclusive use of her stressed out staff. The "zone" would replace the council's existing post room, whose poorly paid staff will be moved to the basement.**

EALING PROCESS

HALLIBURTON, the Texas oil company caught in an accounting scandal that is embarrassing its former chief executive, US vice president Dick Cheney, has a long reach.

As well as being involved in numerous military contracts in the UK (*see Eye* 1059), it also took over many of Ealing council's services, appropriately enough on April Fools' Day 1994. Since then the contract has been marked by financial failures, ill-treatment of employees and poor services.

Halliburton subsidiary Brown & Root took over the borough's manual staff by forming a new firm, Brown & Root Ealing Technical Services (Brets), which was awarded the contract by the then Tory council. Control later switched to Labour, who opposed the privatisation but did not reverse it once in power.

Halliburton originally planned to win contracts for services with other councils, but had little success and so decided on a simpler route to profitability: cutting jobs and wages. It stopped awarding pay rises from 1994, and in 1996 cut salaries by around £1,500 for each member of manual staff. Hours were also increased from 35 to 37.5 a week. Each year brought new redundancies and by 1998 only around 700 of an original staff of 1,493 were left.

The GMB union did win one significant victory last June, when 97 of the cleaners privatised to and then dumped by Halliburton got an out-of-court settlement for £202,350 in lieu of pay rises denied since 1994.

● **CALLERS to Sheffield city council's benefits and council tax "helpline" (0114 2736633) are paying 4p a minute for up to 10 minutes waiting time to reach a menu of recorded messages which ends with the words "To be connected to an attendant, please hold..." followed by "We are sorry, this line is busy. Goodbye." Brrr, click. Brilliant – and well worth 40p, even if you are on benefits!**

BOG STANDARD

SOUTH Lakeland district council has come up with an imaginative solution to the problem of the future cost of upgrading its public toilets to meet the access requirements of the new disability discrimination act – it is closing nearly half of them.

Following another public-private partnership triumph, in which Sita won the contract to maintain Lakeland's loos by bidding low and then walked away from what turned out to be an unprofitable job, the council is saving a piddling £200,000 by closing 27 of the 63 public lavatories in one of the most visited parts of Britain.

Some closures have already taken place, in one case resulting in the spectacle of 100-plus charity walkers, having hiked across Morecambe Bay, queuing to use the downstairs loo of a generous Grange-over-Sands resident. The effect on tourism in an area struggling to recover from foot and mouth could be significant. Coach firms are already threatening to by-pass Grasmere and its gift shops if a "comfort stop" is no longer possible.

● **THE MASTERMIND behind Isle of Wight council's £35,000 stress management policy involving Indian head massage and tree hugging (*Eye* 1053) has been forced to leave following an inquiry prompted by internal complaints.**

Colleagues of the authority's training manager, Annette Culshaw, had reported her for causing, er, stress by bullying her staff. And no amount of her expensive alternative treatments seemed to alleviate the problem. She was also accused of fiddling her department's sickness records. Now Culshaw has left "by mutual consent".

Contracts manager Tricia Stillman, who failed to declare her very personal interest in an £800,000 beach cleaning contract which she recommended — and got councillors to accept — for her husband's firm, Coastline Cleaning, has been treated more leniently. Although an internal inquiry found she and three colleagues had acted improperly, she has kept her job in charge of dishing out millions of pounds of taxpayers' cash to contractors.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

WITH the technology economy on the slide and the PC market saturated, Microsoft has been trying to screw as much money as possible out of existing customers. One lucrative innovation has been the introduction of annually renewable licences for software instead of one-off payments. One of the first to fall for this "new deal" was the UK health department – and now UK schools are in the firing line too.

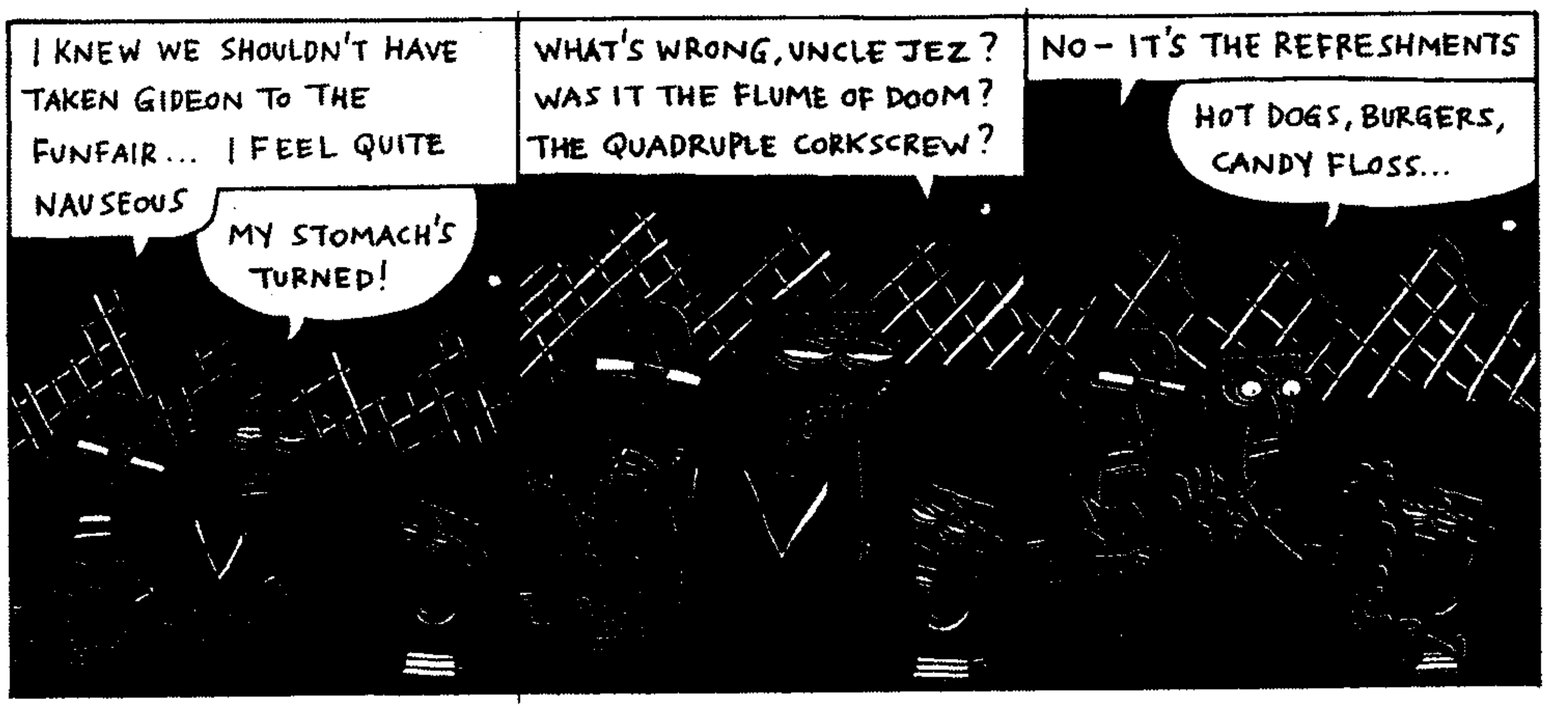
After the demise of rival operating systems from Acorn and RM, which were once widely used in UK schools, Microsoft has enjoyed a monopoly in primary and secondary education for several years. Apart from earning considerable revenue, Microsoft enjoys the incalculable benefit of pupils leaving school knowing nothing about any other kind of software.

But as well as losing the one-off licence fee, schools may be doubly penalised because, for reasons known only to Microsoft, schools do not qualify for the discounted "campus licences" offered to colleges and universities.

Bob Blizzard, Labour MP for Waveney, has raised the matter of campus licences in the Commons after finding that a college in his constituency with 500 computers pays £6,900 a year, while a school with only 152 pays £6,300 and another school with 273 computers pays £11,000. By comparison, last year a school with 396 computers made a one-off payment of £31,700 to buy the licence outright.

So far he has been unable to extract a promise of a better deal for schools from Microsoft.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


I KNEW WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN GIDEON TO THE FUNFAIR... I FEEL QUITE NAUSEOUS
MY STOMACH'S TURNED!
WHAT'S WRONG, UNCLE JEZ? WAS IT THE FLUME OF DOOM? THE QUADRUPLE CORKSCREW?
NO - IT'S THE REFRESHMENTS
HOT DOGS, BURGERS, CANDY FLOSS...

Number crunching

10,000+ ■ Number of clearing places for university courses on the *Times* website.

5 ■ Number of graduate job vacancies on the *Times* website.

NOOKS and CORNERS

"NEW" Labour's deep concern for architecture and the environment is all too evident in Wallsend, part of the Labour fiefdom of North Tyneside.

As reported in Rotten Boroughs in *Eye* 1059, North Tyneside council has accepted the bid by Kajima Europe UK Holding Ltd, one of "new" Labour's interesting new friends, to build four schools under the private finance initiative (PFI). One of the schools is to be in Wallsend, and the plans submitted by Kajima involve the demolition of existing buildings on the site. These include the worthless 1960s structures of the Burnside Community High School but also the separate and distinctive block which was once Wallsend Grammar School, now an annexe.

This has created disquiet locally, one objector questioning the appointment of Kajima "given their historic involvement in the enslaving of Koreans and Chinese during the war and bribery scandal relating to Japanese building contracts in the 1990s". But as far as this column is concerned, what matters is that the former Grammar School is a dignified and interesting Baroque Revival building of 1914 which, as the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne points out, lies within a conservation area, enhances the setting of St Peter's Church nearby, and — especially as the Grammar School had a tradition of serving the community — contributes to creating a "sense of place" and in reinforcing local identity.

Wallsend Grammar School

The building could perfectly well be reused for educational use – it is a school being built, after all. That would save money and be environmentally responsible. But such an approach would be far too complex and sensitive for Kajima and its architects. Needless to say North Tyneside has given permission for the demolition.

THINGS are even worse in "new" Labour Scotland, where the enthusiasm of the Scottish parliament for its astronomically expensive new building at Holyrood is such that the Historic Buildings Council has been wound up and Historic Scotland is starved of money for grant aid for historic buildings.

Then there is the Minister for Tourism, Culture 'n' Sport responsible for encouraging new Scottish architecture, "Lord" Mike Watson, MSP – best known for his opposition to hunting and his attempt to block Mohammad Sarwar's selection as Labour candidate in Govan. When asked to identify some living Scottish architects he failed to come up with a single name.

I don't suppose he could have named any dead ones either – and he certainly will not have heard of F.T. Pilkington. Yet Pilkington was the greatest and most original genius of the Gothic Revival in Scotland, the only designer intelligent enough to adapt Ruskinian Gothic to the needs of Presbyterian congregations.

His greatest masterpiece is the Barclay Church in Edinburgh, whose walls of textured stone bristle and bulge to enclose an astonishing galleried, theatre-like interior. And then there is his Trinity Free Church at Irvine built in 1861-63, an amazing composition of Italian Gothic detail in two colours of stone, gables and walls thrusting in all directions, vigorous sculpture and, towering over all, a great Gothic steeple.

Unfortunately this extraordinary, truly original creation is redundant. Worse, it stands in a deeply depressed Ayrshire town in the shadow of Glasgow. Most of Irvine was smashed up in the 1960s, but what is left of the town centre is dominated by Pilkington's church. For a time it was converted into an arts centre, but that folded. For the last decade, Trinity Free Church has been abandoned, slowly rotting and open to the rain and the vandals – only the damp has stopped bonfires setting the whole place alight. Yet this remarkable building is listed; is one of the finest 19th century structures in Scotland and is the only piece of architecture in Irvine worth going to see. It ought to be treasured.

So what are North Ayrshire council, Historic Scotland and the egregious Lord Watson of Invergowrie doing about this scandal? Nothing. Meanwhile the bill for the ridiculous parliament building, ostensibly designed by a Catalan, is £300m and rising.

'Piloti'

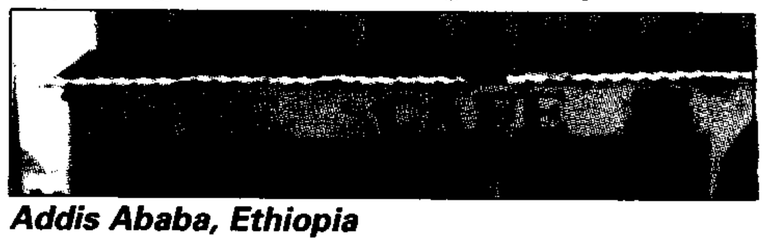
I-SPY

Submitted by E. Ghosh, T. Collins, G. Lastra, C.F. Allen. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

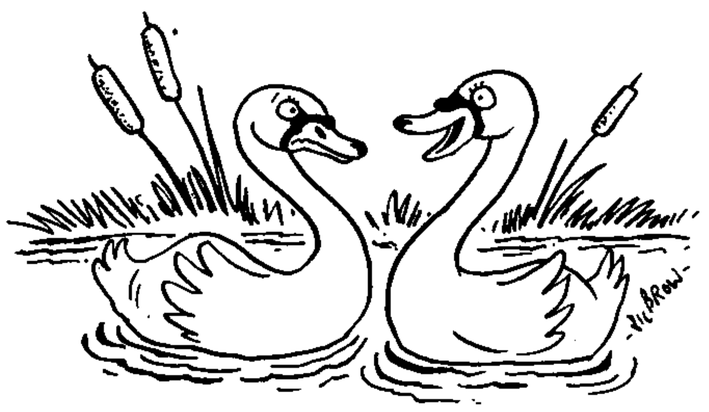
Prague

Copenhagen

Aragon, S. Spain



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



"I used to be an ugly duckling... then I had surgery"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE removal of Colin Walsh as organist of Lincoln Cathedral (on the grounds of job restructuring, according to the Dean and Chapter) had an interesting spin-off recently on Radio 4's cultural conversation slot *Front Row*. The BBC had music critic Michael White to comment, and he made the point that although the circumstances of Walsh's departure were no doubt steeped in spiritual politics of a local, Trollopian kind (ie the cathedral just wanted to get rid of its organist) there was a broader issue at stake.

This "job restructuring" involved downgrading the direction of music in the cathedral to a mere part-time activity. Outrageous, said the critic, launching into a defence of Anglican cathedral music, the centrality of choral evensong to England's cultural heritage etc etc, adding that such things were under attack on all sides these days - not least from hard core evangelicals. A few months earlier, White had visited a fashionable South Kensington tabernacle for born-again bankers and heard the minister tell his congregation that the best thing about the church was the organ, and the best thing about the organ was that it didn't work - a piece of information greeted by the bankers with spontaneous applause.

All this was noted by the duty officer in charge of continuity at the BBC who rang through to *Front Row* and insisted that at the end of the programme the presenter should apologise for this story. Both presenter and producer protested that there was nothing to apologise for, but the continuity man insisted that it would offend Lincoln Cathedral in particular and evangelicals in general. An argument ensued. And an apology was made.

Since then, *Front Row* has had nothing but letters of commendation for its stand, and the BBC has not only retracted the apology but apologised for it. But it does seem that the bowels of Broadcasting House harbour some distinctly partisan spirits on the subject of church music, prepared to take peremptory action in support of their own views. So much for licence-funded free debate.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

NATIONAL GALLERY
OCTOBER
ART IN THE MAKING
UNDERDRAWINGS IN RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS
Infra Red light shows up the original drawings beneath the paint-it seems the Old Masters often changed their minds about a work.
Whereas we always get it right first time.
That's the beauty of Conceptualism.

Letters

One page of our last issue (1061) provoked a big reaction from our readers. Here are some of the highlights.

Anti

Page 17 of the current edition of Private Eye is worse than the tabloids it is trying to parody. The crime at Soham is so terrible that anyone trying to make a joke of it is almost as sick as the murderer. You should be ashamed of yourself.

P.T. SHERWOOD.

...To attempt to make humour out of the Soham tragedy and in particular the cartoon of the Pied Piper plumbs, even for your publication, the depths of depravity.

PETER WALMSLEY.

Many of your readers will have written in saying that they will not buy Private Eye in future because the contents of page 17 of Private Eye 1061 in which you made jokes centring on the Soham tragedy reveal you to be sick. I disagree. Anyone who can think that that "humour" may be acceptable is just mad.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT EDWARDS.

...For Private Eye to spend a whole page joking about this makes me ill. I no longer wish to read Private Eye. You disgust me.

SARAH GANTZ.

Pro

In anticipation of the numerous responses to page 17 of the 23 Aug issue, I wish to be counted in the Pro section. When the ghoulish and platitudinous press make me sick, you are the Alka-Seltzer.

Hope you dodge the vigilantes,

D.M.

...I have rarely been so sickened by my own profession, journalism, as I have been since the Soham tragedy unfolded. As I write, Sky News still show no sign of unearthing another story. More power to you, Eye.

PAUL STUMP.

Thank god for Private Eye! Your attack on the media's coverage of the sorry Soham saga was richly deserved. Over the last several weeks we have witnessed the tabloidization of the British news media, with television, radio, and broadsheets sucked into the hysteria which has promoted an essentially local news story into a national — and even international — event of unrivalled magnitude.

NICK HAYSOM.

...your swipe at the media feeding frenzy and the "get a quote from anyone" mentality of the press was both accurate and well considered. No doubt some will be offended, but that offence would be better directed at the media circus that the tragic events appeared to generate.

One example of this was visible outside one of my local newsagents on 21 August when a placard for the Gloucester Citizen announced "Jessica and Holly – Vicar's County Link!" I am sure there are many other examples of such nebulous and contrived reporting of the case.

Keep up the good work.

R.E. STAMP.

Oil's not well

Sir,

Flattered though I always am to appear in your esteemed organ your report of my oil activities ("Man in the Eye") was wrong in almost every respect.

The allegation that I was in charge of a sanctions-busting operation is a moth-eaten story, long since rebutted and disproved.

I hope you didn't have to shell out a single euro for such a rehash.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN DUNCAN,
House of Commons, London.

Victim support

Sir,

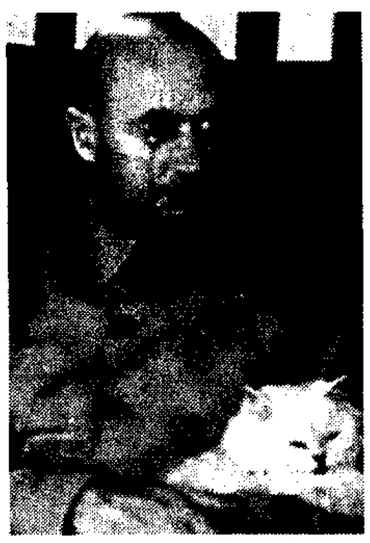
There is an axiom in the criminal fraternity "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime." After reading your items on disabled cons (In the Back, Eye 1061) this could read "If you're fit to do the crime you're fit to do the time!"

It would have been instructive to have been told what crimes these disabled cons had committed, especially those cons who could not walk. Their guilt is presumably unquestioned, since we would have been bored to distraction by now with "So-and-so is Innocent" campaigns on their behalf if there was any question of their guilt, so just what is the Eye trying to prove by this whining item?

My sympathy is with their victims.

ANTHONY JONES,
Via email.

Lookalike



Fayed

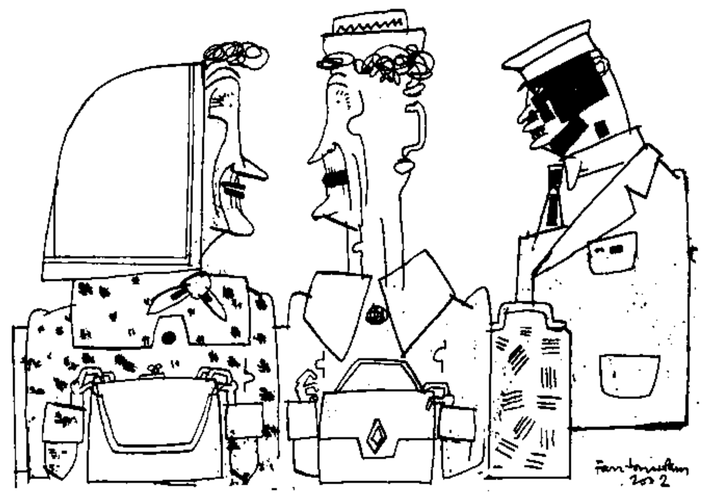
Blofeld

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the similarity between Mohamed Al Fayed and Ernst Stavro Blofeld – James Bond's nemesis. I wonder are they related?

MATTHEW CARSE,
Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Actually things are a lot better nowadays than they were in my day"

Saint George?

Sir,

*Whatever Bush may be – stupid, a dumbo, an ignoramus — one thing he is **not** is evil.*

Yours faithfully,
M. ROSE,
London W2.

Making the grade

Sir,

Jim Wayfairer (Letters, Eye 1061) is wrong to assert that making an exam easier would increase the number of A grades: there are, in fact, checks and balances to ensure that the criteria for attaining a particular grade remain the same year on year.

In the old days, as Mr Wayfairer mentions, a fixed proportion of the candidates was allocated to each grade. This was a straightforward method of grading, but it made progress impossible because even if there was a genuine improvement in overall attainment from one year to the next, it would not be reflected in the grades allocated. What incentive was there for a teacher to push the brightest students when the top x percent would get As anyway? Equally, what incentive was there to encourage the less able when the bottom x percent were deemed to have failed? The system might as well have let all students coast, as the distribution of grades would always be the same anyway.

Nowadays, what happens is this. Careful judgements are made regarding the difficulty of a paper, and the grade thresholds may be adjusted upwards or downwards accordingly.

Yours
ALEX MACFIE,
Abergavenny.

Log jam

Sir,

Philip Roe (Eye 1059) might wish to reconsider the principles which underpin his pedagogy. Rather than falling standards or the neglect of 12-year-olds, I would suggest that changing priorities lie behind the mathematics that is taught in our schools. While logarithms would have been fundamental in basic arithmetic classes in the pre-calculator days of the 1950s, 12-year-olds are now quite rightly spared the drudgery to concentrate on more practical pursuits. Logarithms are thus saved for 17-year-olds for reasons of relevance rather than complexity, which is probably why his rascally 12-year-old listened so attentively.

Despite a degree in applied mathematics, I happily remain alongside Sam Cooke in not knowing what a slide rule is for...

NEIL HARRISON,
Via email.

Bottom line

Sir,

My pleasure at achieving the distinction of being the subject of a letter in the Eye ("Cross words", Eye 1061) is somewhat tempered by the fact that it is not for any great accomplishment (or misdemeanour) but for a playground snigger at my surname. I accept that the scatological connotations of the juxtaposition of "crapper" with "big jobs" and "anal retentive" might tickle some under-developed funny bones but, at the risk of appearing pedantic, to "micturate" means to "urinate" — does your correspondent know his arse from his urethra, or was he just taking the piss!? Also, I resent the suggestion that just because my surname is "Crapper" I spend all my time sitting on the "thunderbox" doing crosswords (although my wife points out that this is, fundamentally, true).

I remain, sir, in the downstairs loo with last Saturday's Grauniad and a copy of Roget's Thesaurus.

MIKE CRAPPER,

Whitchurch.

Payne relief

Sir,

Maybe, as you say, (Music & Musicians, Eye 1061) "the entire London arts establishment is rallying round Payne, the brutally dispatched director-general" of English National Opera but the regular audience is delighted he's gone.

He presided over productions which were not only pornographic but box-office disasters. The simulated on-stage copulation at completely inappropriate moments in two classic operas were merely examples of the depths to which Anthony Payne dragged the ENO down. It so happened that he came to an informal gathering of the Friends of ENO and I had the satisfaction of telling him what I thought of him to the general approval of the others present.

Good riddance!

Yours sincerely,

CHRISTINA SPEIGHT,

Via email.

Engine trouble

Sir,

With regards to the "tasteless" Airbus advertisement. If you lose power from one engine on a twin-engined plane you lose 50 percent of all power. If you lose one engine on a four-engined plane, you only lose 25 percent of power. Add to that the effect of overcoming drag from the disabled engine and you will see that for long haul four engines is a lot more sensible than two. Asymmetric flying (flying with more power available to one side of the plane) is a damned sight easier if you have something fighting with you (ie the remaining engine).

MICHAEL CARTER,

Via email.

Sir,

Re Ad Nauseam (Eye 1061) and multi-engined aircraft. When Lord Hives was chairman of the aero-engine manufacturer Rolls Royce, he was asked why he only travelled in four-engined aircraft. "Because there are no five-engined aircraft!" came the reply. Verb sap.

Regards,

PATRICK FOSSETT,

Via email.

Don't know jack

Sir,

In your current issue, Jonty Driver is slightly in error. The actor pictured is not Fred Griffiths (he was the "worker" who memorably raised two fingers at John Le Mesurier) but John Comer, a non-professional discovered for I'm All Right Jack and later to become very familiar to BBC television viewers as the henpecked cafe owner Sid in Last of the Summer Wine. Pip pip.

CY YOUNG,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Roy Keane... didn't go through the book with a fine toothbrush."
TONY CASCARINO, Radio 5 Live
(Andy Harries)

"I bet Keegan will be jumping like a Jack in a Beanstalk."
Commentator, Sky Sports News
(Michael Baskerville)

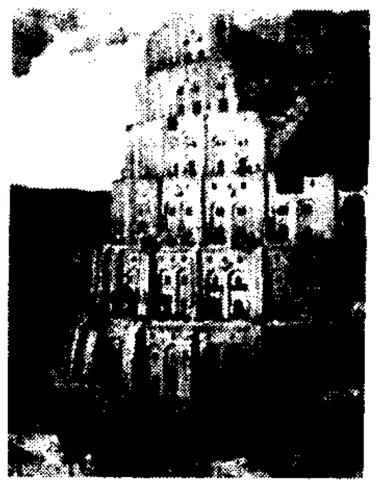
"He's got a heart as big as his size, which isn't big – but his heart's bigger than that."
KEVIN KEEGAN, Radio 5 Live
(Ena B. Mann)

"And the Premiership season is drawing to a conclusion on its first day..."
RAY STUBBS, BBC
(Nathan Hamer)

"Some couples are so famous that they're recognisable from just their first names – Posh and Becks."
Women's Hour, Radio 4
(Ben Colburn)

Lookalike

Tower of Babel



Israeli settlements

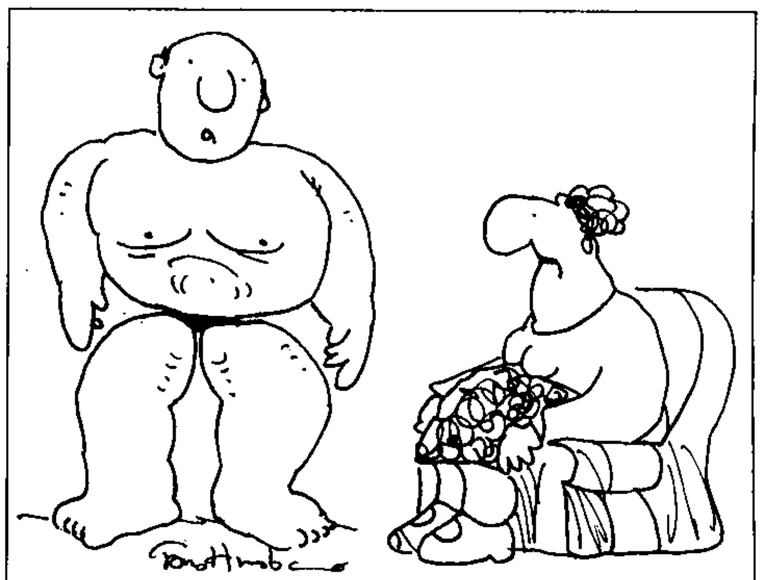
Sir,

Have you by any chance noticed the similarity between the architecture of Israeli settlements (New York Times 11th August) and an earlier attempt to get closer to divine approval (as portrayed by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1563). Perhaps the Palestinians can take heart from the fate of the Babylonians. Should we inform the God-fearing Mr Bush that his allies might be on the path to divine retribution?

Yours faithfully,

JOE HOVA,

The Bible Belt.



"Huh... it's years since I wore these swimming trunks"

Foot in mouth

Sir,

Re: Paul Foot's article, "Wild About Barry".

Can I first of all mention that no trade unions are affiliated to TUCETU. It is an individual member organisation and each pays an annual membership fee.

I only wish I was as influential as the sentinels of the far left think I am. As a reputable journalist Paul Foot should not believe all that he reads on his friend's Labournet website. Most of it is pure romantic fiction – without the romance! To suggest I had a "plan" – no doubt regarded as some sort of conspiracy by those who write such nonsense – is plainly ridiculous. Of course I wish to see the moderates in Amicus/AEEU and PCS succeed. That has never been in question: just as Mr Foot and his leftist cohorts wish their friends to succeed. To suggest that TUCETU organised a "plan" for the elections in either union via my "remarkable" circular is plain drivel. If anyone had a "plan" it was the moderates in the PCS and the executive elections seem to point to their success.

Mr Foot's suggestion that TUCETU's "main aim is to maintain right wing control of trade unions" is manifestly untrue. TUCETU's main aim is to maintain NATO as the mainstay of the Atlantic Alliance appreciating as it does the role of the United States and Europe in maintaining democracy and supporting the values encapsulated in the original North Atlantic Treaty and pursued over the last 50 and more years. If that coincides with support for moderates and moderation, so be it – let's have more of it.

Yours faithfully

PETER ROBINSON,

Director, Trades Union Committee for European and Transatlantic Understanding.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **The Balkans**

from Our Own Correspondent

NO SOONER has the foreign affairs committee of MPs recommended that Britain should license mercenaries for use on "humanitarian missions" than an employment tribunal condemns one such private military firm, DynCorp, for unfairly sacking a UN police officer who reported a prostitution racket among her colleagues in Bosnia.

The MPs' report, published last month, followed the lead of Jack Straw's recent green paper in accepting that private military firms are here to stay and should be licensed for use in UN operations. Straw's paper mentioned DynCorp no fewer than eight times as one of the companies which "maintain a reputation as respectable organisations".

DynCorp was hired by the US government to supply police officers for the international force in Bosnia. It in turn hired Kathryn Bolkovac, an ex-cop from Nebraska, to join the team. On reaching the Balkans she discovered that some DynCorp staff were turning a blind eye to prostitution, including forced sex-trafficking – and others were even actively engaged in the sex-slave trade. When she presented the evidence to her bosses and other UN officials, Bolkovac was sacked.

Although DynCorp is an American firm, it runs its military operations in Bosnia from an office in Aldershot, so Bolkovac sued for unfair dismissal under British employment law. At the hearing in Southampton, the company claimed she was fired for fiddling timesheets – a story that the tribunal concluded was "completely unbelievable. There is no doubt whatever that the reason for her dismissal was that she made a protected disclosure".

Bolkovac's whistleblowing was justified by her concern about "the extent of trafficking in women and girls by organised criminal groups for purposes of prostitution and particularly the involvement of UN personnel [including DynCorp staff] in such trafficking and prostitution".

The strength of her allegations was reinforced by a separate and simultaneous case, this time in Texas, where helicopter mechanic Ben Johnston alleged that he too was sacked by DynCorp in Bosnia after revealing that staff were buying under-age girls and selling guns. DynCorp eventually agreed to settle the case last month, only a few hours after Bolkovac's victory in Southampton.

Evidence gathered for the Johnston case included an admission from one DynCorp officer that he had illegally "bought" a Romanian woman and a machine gun. It also showed that at least 13 DynCorp employees have been sent home from Bosnia for buying women or "participating in other prostitution-related activities". Not all of them have been fired, however, and none has been prosecuted; apparently sex-trafficking is not such a serious offence as blowing the whistle on it.

In his evidence to the select committee, foreign office minister Denis MacShane persuaded MPs that these new-style military companies could be regulated because their business interests kept them on the straight and narrow. "Of course any firm of any sort that was accused of committing human rights violations, if those allegations were shown to be true, would never receive any future contract of any sort. So it would be signing its own death warrant."

Really? Despite the growing evidence that some DynCorp employees have engaged in gun-running and sex-trafficking, the firm continues to win contracts. The idea that "business interests" alone will keep firms on the straight and narrow is particularly risible in the case of DynCorp. One of its directors, Herbert S. "Pug" Winokur, was also the chairman of Enron's financial committee.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"Killing yourself by putting a plastic bag over your head may not be everyone's cup of tea," Philip Nitschke of Exit told a press conference in Brisbane, "but such measures are forced upon us by a government that refuses to legalise euthanasia. Our Exit Bag may be distasteful to many people, but it's comfortable – one size fits all – and for those who want to die and are unable to access or pay for lethal drugs, it offers a free, peaceful and reliable death."

Earlier, Nitschke had revealed that his society's plastic Exit Bag "is based on a Canadian model, with a cloth neck and drawstring. It is being given away free to members of voluntary euthanasia societies, but only if they have been members for at least six months, and are willing to attend a seminar to learning how to use the Exit Bag, and acquire some other related and useful skills. You do need to know what you're doing. Technique is vital, so you must attend a training course."

Queensland anthropologist Pam Watson then explained why she had put her name down for one of the 500 Exit Bags which have initially been produced. "I'm getting old and I want to be sure that I have a peaceful death. I don't have any life-threatening illness at the moment, so I'll keep the bag in the cupboard until I need it. If the government would make a lethal dose of Nembutal available, that would be better still, but they're not doing that, so the bag is perfect for me."

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie condemned the bags, saying that "if they become available to all, there is no way to know who will get hold of them. But we're not going to ban them, because what's the point? You can go to Woolworths and get a plastic bag and end your life if you want to." *(The Australian, 21/8/02. Spotter: Martin Philip)*

—o—

"I tell you, it's a military operation," Bruce Jefferson told reporters in Prague, "and if The Obese Family choose you, there is nothing you can do. They're so fat, the victim can't even see what's going on, so he has no chance. I mean, I'm a big guy, but this group is afraid of no one."

Jefferson was speaking about a seven-member gang known as "The Obese Family," whose pick-pocketing activities on tram lines 9, 22, and 23 have become notorious within the city. "First, an innocent-looking pregnant woman gets onto the tram and demands a tourist's seat," explained another witness, Adam Ellick, "and when he stands up, five hugely obese men quickly move in and surround him with their stomachs. Within seconds, the gang is rifling his pockets, and his valuables are dumped into a carrier bag, which is handed to a slimmer youth. He flees from the tram, often screaming 'The Obese Family has struck again' in Czech, while the tourist is detained by a wall of blubber until the next stop. The five fat men are so loud and obese that the tourist usually doesn't even realise what's going on until it's too late. He just thinks the tram is particularly crowded. And when The Obese Family are on board, it is." (The Prague Post, 29 May – 4 June 2002. Spotter: James Murray)

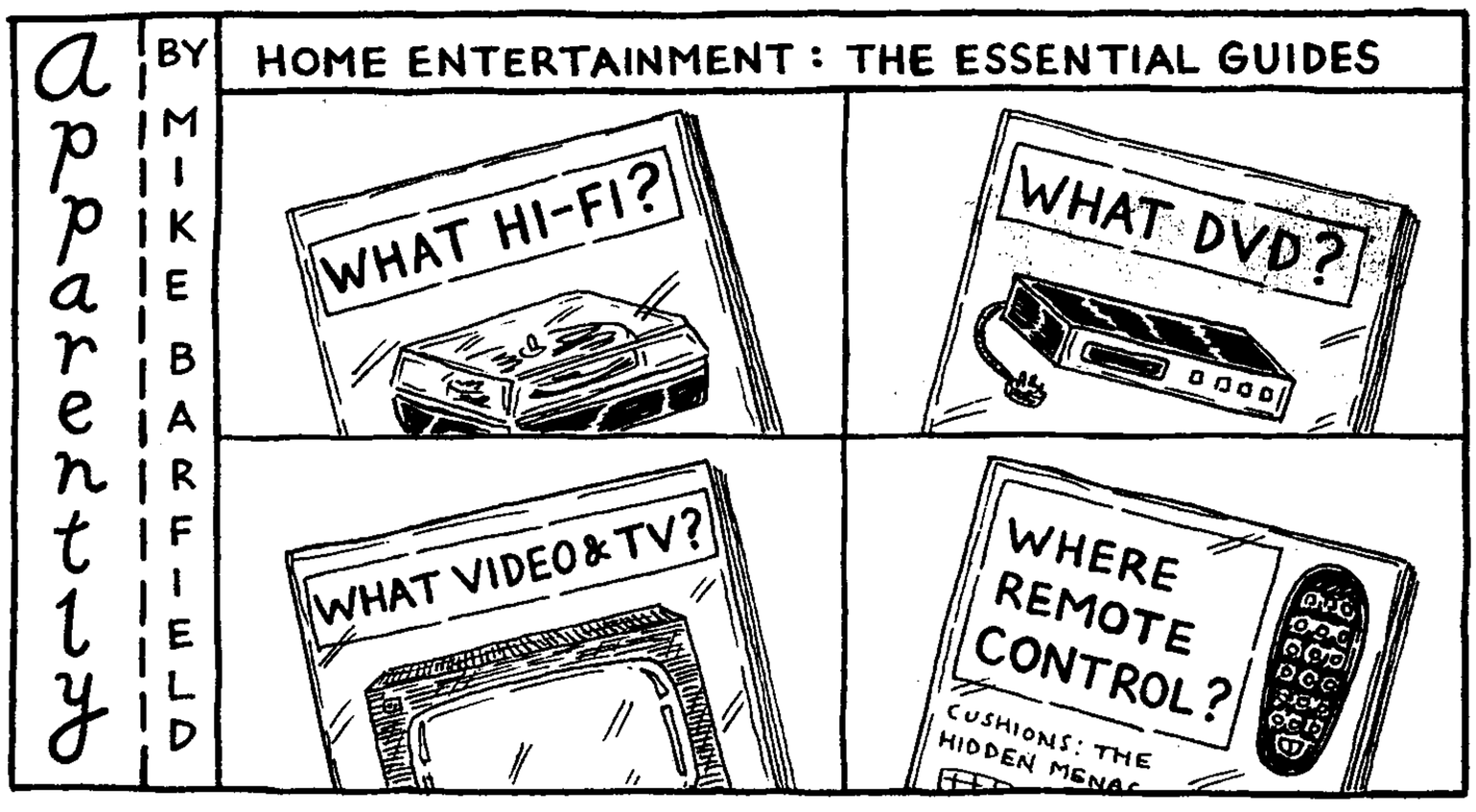
—o—

"Although you have been found guilty of a serious offence, there are mitigating circumstances," Judge Michael Forde told Craig Hilton Bell, while passing judgement on him in a Brisbane court. "In particular, you are the first person in the history of Queensland ever to be convicted of procuring a sexual assault against himself, and for that reason I have decided not to pass a custodial sentence."

Earlier, Bell's counsel had explained the circumstances that led to Bell, 43, having committed an estimated 300 offences. "Due to fear of losing his position as loans manager at the Commonwealth Bank, the defendant felt under pressure, and found that he could only become sexually aroused if his testicles were fondled by women. In order to satisfy his needs, he began visiting women doctors all over Queensland, claiming that he had been hit in the groin with a cricket bat, and asking them to examine his testicles. Most of the doctors never realised that he was obtaining gratification in this way, but complaints were made after he became visibly aroused during one

examination. Technically, the only sexual assault that has taken place is upon my client, though clearly at his own request, and we therefore request leniency."

Bell pleaded guilty to 35 charges of sexual assault against himself, and was ordered to perform 240 hours of community service. *(The Courier-Mail [Brisbane], 27/7/02. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And this week your vicar is in the lovely city of Johannesburg in South Africa; but not, I assure you, on holiday!

I have come here with a few members of the PCC (70) to take part in a really inspiring conference which is going to end all poverty and save the planet!

And there can't be anyone, surely, who wouldn't agree that this sounds like a pretty good idea!

But there are always going to be a few 'doubting Thomases' (or in Mr Porritt's case 'doubting Jonathans'!) who are ready to pour cold water on even the most well-intentioned ideas!

Mr Porritt says that your vicar hasn't been giving enough of a 'moral lead' when it comes to 'green issues'.

I gather he has even been dragging in such matters as the tarmacking over of part of the church yard to provide much needed parking space, and my decision to allow a 300 foot Orange mobile phone mast to be erected in the church tower.

He has also criticised me personally for giving pride of place at last year's Harvest Festival to Mr Sainsbury's 70-foot-long genetically modified marrow.

No doubt it makes Mr Porritt feel very righteous when he accuses me of being too friendly with our local business community, but hey, get real, Jonny!

How on earth does he think we are going to wipe out world poverty by the year 2010, without the help of the people like Mr Sainsbury who create the world's wealth? It was all very well for Our Lord to tell his followers that 'the poor will always be with you', but we can do better than that in the 21st Century!

Defeatist or what? No, your vicar and like-minded souls from all around the world are here in South Africa to work out how to make poor people rich without making rich people poor.

Think about it!

And to mark this historic moment when we can at last look forward to a world without poverty or pollution, I have written a special chorus to be sung at this year's harvest thanksgiving.

'There is a green conference far away
Without the Reverend Bush
But he's very busy doing something else
So let's not make a fuss'

Yours 'in Gaia'

Tony

POSTCARD FROM MR PRESCOTT

Dear Parish

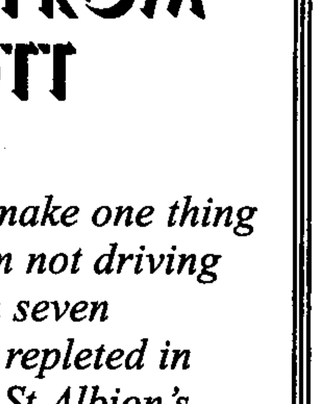
I would just like to make one thing aboundingly clear. I am not driving out in Johannesburg in seven Mercedes, as has been repleted in certain media, e.g. the St Albion's Mercury. The number of vehicles applicated to my motorcade was only 5. So much for my so-called hippocraticness on green issues.

J. Prescott

• My Greatest Mistake •

An occasional series in which leading parishioners frankly and humbly confess their manifold sins and wickedness in a light-hearted way which shows them up in a good light.

This week: **The Editor of this newsletter, Alistair Campbell**



● *My biggest mistake ever was to publish this picture of the vicar making him look like a complete idiot. He must have been furious, and I would certainly never do it again. A.C.*

Next week: **Mr Mandleson – 'My greatest mistake was to resign when I wasn't even guilty'. (Editor's note: this feature may be dropped next issue for reasons of space.)**

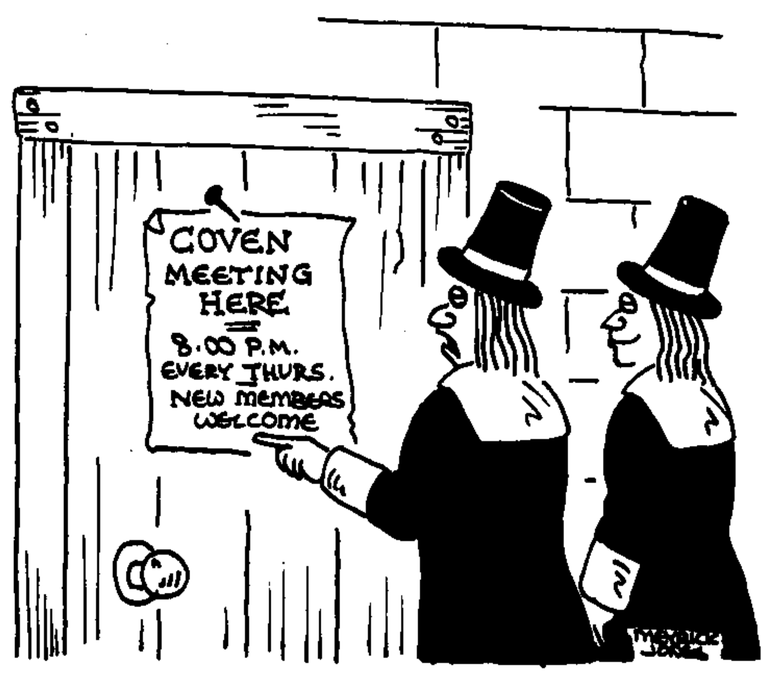
EARTH SUMMIT NEWS!

"I'm ready for when the ice cap melts" says Mr Prescott

A Message from the Rev. Dubya of the First Church of the Latter Day Morons

Brothers and sisters in the Lord. All around me I hear the fainthearts chickening out of my great crusade to rid the world of the evil Satan who, even as I speak, is preparing the Armageddon for us all that was promised by the Book of Revelations. I even hear your own Minister, the Rev. Tim Blower, and his friend Mr Jake Strawberry, saying to me 'Be careful, Dubya, look before you leap. But I'm tellin' the world, I am a leaper, not a looker. Lookin' is for wimps! No offence to you, Mr Prayer, and your charming lady Cherylene. This is no time to save the world. It's time to end it. As your own great leader, Mr Winston Churchyard put it so well 'Go on Saddam, make my day'.

Rev. Dubye Bush,
Moron Tabernacle, Utah



"This witch finding thing – it's much easier than people would have you believe"

COUGH TO BE DROPPED?

By Our Political Staff **Francis Wheeze**

ALL FIVE remaining members of the Conservative Party were last night said to be in "open revolt" against their party leader, Iain Duncan Cough.

"Iain is doing a tremendous job," said one leading rebel, "but he has been very badly advised by those who have told him not to say anything about anything".

However, friends of Duncan Cough dismissed the charge, pointing out that his policy of saying nothing was already paying enormous dividends.

"Cough has united the party as never before," said the friend. "They are 100 percent in favour of getting rid of him as soon as possible."

On other pages

■ How I Risked My Life To Help Mugabe To Power by **Iain Duncan Cough** 6

■ The Unknown Michael Ancram by **Peter O'Bore** 10

(That's enough Tories. Ed.)

MONTHS OF RAIL CHAOS LIKELY

By Our Transport Correspondent **Linda Lee Potters Bar**

PASSENGERS have been warned that they face months of delayed journeys when the West Coast mainline between London, the north East and Scotland isn't closed down for the next eight months.

"Passengers who still want to travel at this time can expect chaos, with dirty, filthy overcrowded carriages, numerous trains cancelled for no apparent reason and regular breakdowns," warned a Virgin rail spokesman.

"Their journeys may take significantly longer than they'd planned as they won't be transferred to a replacement bus service."

However, on the bright side, he did say that passengers could look forward to the line being shut down completely for four months from next summer when they can finally stop using it altogether.

BUSH AND CHURCHILL

What They Have In Common

by Our World War Three Staff
Sir John Keegan, Bruce Anderson-Shelter and **Simon Hefferlump**

1. They are both world leaders.
2. They both have the initial Dubya.
3. They have both rid the world of an evil tyrant with a moustache, except Bush.
4. Er...
5. That's it.

TARGET: LONDON

THE TIMETABLE OF TERROR – WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED BUT DIDN'T

By Our Terror Staff **Clare Monger**

08.47 Gunman Kevin Chatty checks into Ryan Air's Stockholm desk.
09.00 Chatty asked "Did you pack this gun yourself?"
09.04 Ryan Air tells passengers that it regrets that flight number 09.11 to Stansted is still in Majorca undergoing a refit.
13.17 Ryan Air staff offer complimentary voucher to all passengers to take a "no frills" bus home.
17.32 "No frills bus" cancelled. No reason given.
19.10 Ryan Air discover plane that works and ask passengers to begin boarding plane announcing "only one gun allowed in each piece of hand baggage".
20.03 Inspector Knøcker of the Fjord swoops on Chatty. "He must be a lunatic," says Knøcker, "wanting to fly Ryan Air".
22.00 All Britain's newspapers report that Chatty was personally trained by Bin Laden to blow up London, under headline "Target London".
23.32 Headline hastily changed to "Hats off to Baby Romeo" as Target story turns out not to be true.

ON OTHER PAGES
■ The sinister figure who wanted to destroy London – Ken Livingstone and his evil plan to target commuters. *(That's enough Red Ken. Ed.)*

Late News

WOMEN BEING PANICKED INTO I.D.S.

EXPERTS say that too many women are being panicked into opting for I.D.S. because of scare stories in the Daily Mail.

"These women are led to believe that choosing I.D.S. will benefit them," said one horrified political journalist, "whereas the truth is that opting for I.D.S. has proved to be a very costly and painful *(Continued page 94)*

9/11 ONE YEAR ON

2000 of the world's most famous people remember where they were and what they were doing

SIR CHARLES POWELL

I was lunching at the Garrick with a very important person, i.e. myself, when I received a message that something pretty serious had happened in America. I immediately put a call through to some other very important people, and we all agreed that we should go off and watch the television to find out what was going on.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE-KRISPY

I was in my office in the White House when the telephone rang and someone said, "You should put on the television." When I was what was happening, I immediately rang the President to tell him to watch the television, but I was told that he was too busy watching television to take my call.

SIR EDWARD HEATH

I was giving lunch in Salisbury to a group of Chinese businessmen, whom I was entertaining with my celebrated recording of the Elgar Cockayne Overture. In the middle of the performance a member of my staff entered the room and suggested that I should switch on the televison. I quite rightly told him that I had rather more important things to do.

CHRIS PATTTEN

I was having a series of very important meetings with senior members of the European Commission to discuss our new Single European Fish Initiative, and a number of very interesting views had been put forward, particularly by the Luxembourg minister for posts and telecommunications. At this point I had a call from my old friend John Major, to say that he had switched on the television to watch the final of the NatWest Trophy, only to find that a terrible disaster had happened. I had to inform my colleagues and we then agreed to adjourn the meeting and watch the television.

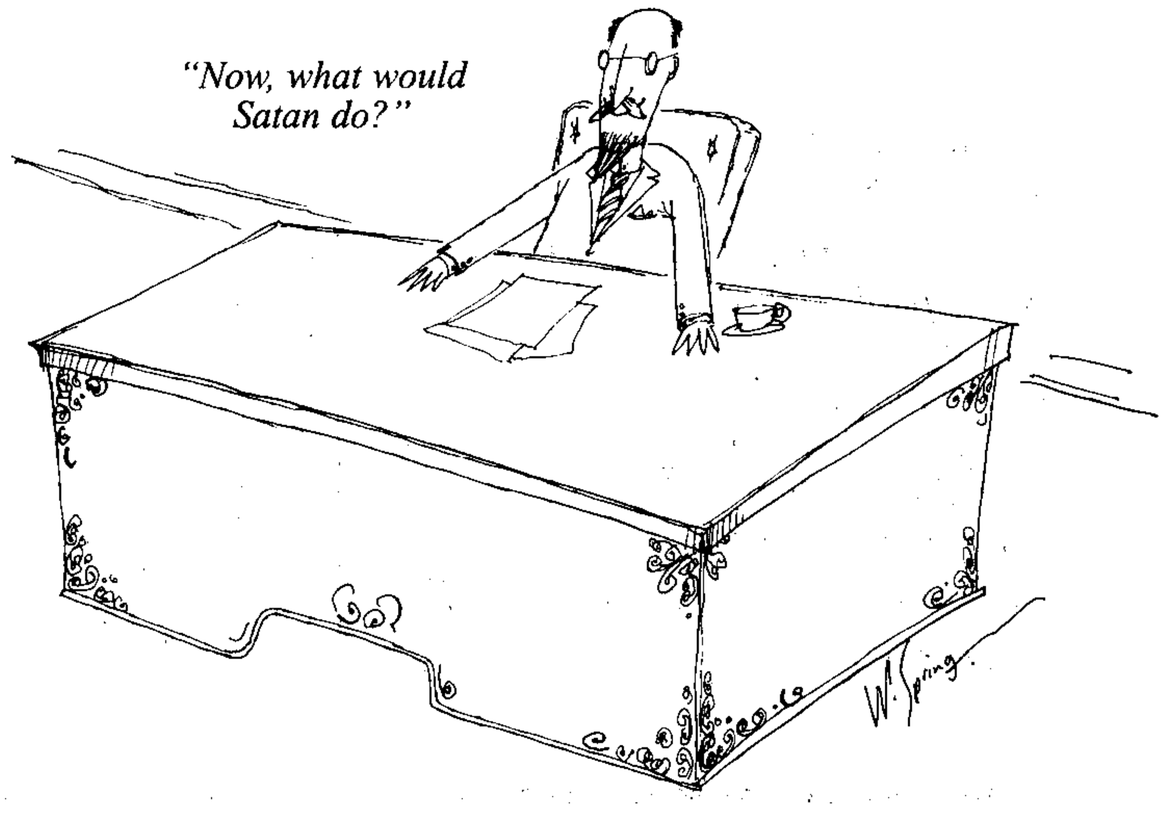
SUE MACGREGOR

Unfortunately I was fast asleep having done the Today programme, which always meant that I had to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning in order to be at White City in time for our first editorial meeting which was always promptly at 4.30. Unfortunately on this occasion a really major disaster took place in the afternoon, well after the Today programme had gone off the air.

OSAMA BIN LADEN

I was in my cave shooting my latest video when someone rang on my mobile to tell me I should be watching the televison.

● Extracted from the specially commissioned 14-part Radio Four series *9/11: One Year On*, presented by Edward Stourton – "Radio's Mr Posh".



DID YOU GRIEVE ENOUGH?

A Daily Gnome probe to see if *you* are really caring

❶ How many hours have you wept in the light of recent tragedies and anniversaries of tragedies?
a) One
b) Three
c) More

❷ How many minutes silence for something did you observe yesterday?
a) One
b) Three
c) Still observing

❸ How many books of condolence have you signed this week?
a) None
b) One
c) Twenty four and over

❹ How many copies of the Daily Gnome's "A Nation Mourns Again" supplement have you bought?
a) Two hundred
b) Three hundred
b) Less than this because I am a mean uncaring callous bastard who is not fit to live in society and call myself a human being.

Exclusive to all papers

GHOULS MUST LEAVE VILLAGE

THIS nation must hang its head in shame today after it was revealed by the people of Soham that 'ghouls' were hanging around the village making it impossible for the community to return to any sort of normality.

The locals say these sick individuals have been spotted taking pictures outside the families local church, scribbling down notes outside the family home and incredibly, some have even been so callous as to stop mourners leaving services in a vain attempt to speak to them.

Whoever these twisted individuals are, we demand they leave the village immediately.

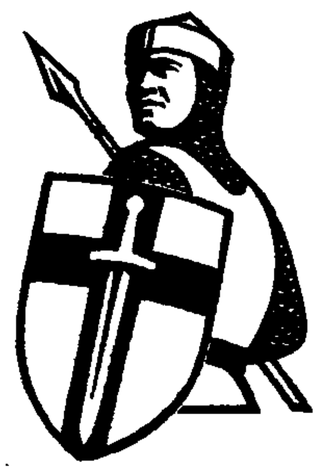
On Other Pages

Exclusive Pictures of Soham Church Service **4-17**

'Leave Me Alone,' says Weeping Mourner Leaving Church Service in exclusive interview **18-43**

'Bring Back Hanging for Ghouls' says no-one **44-57**

£1 MILLION REWARD



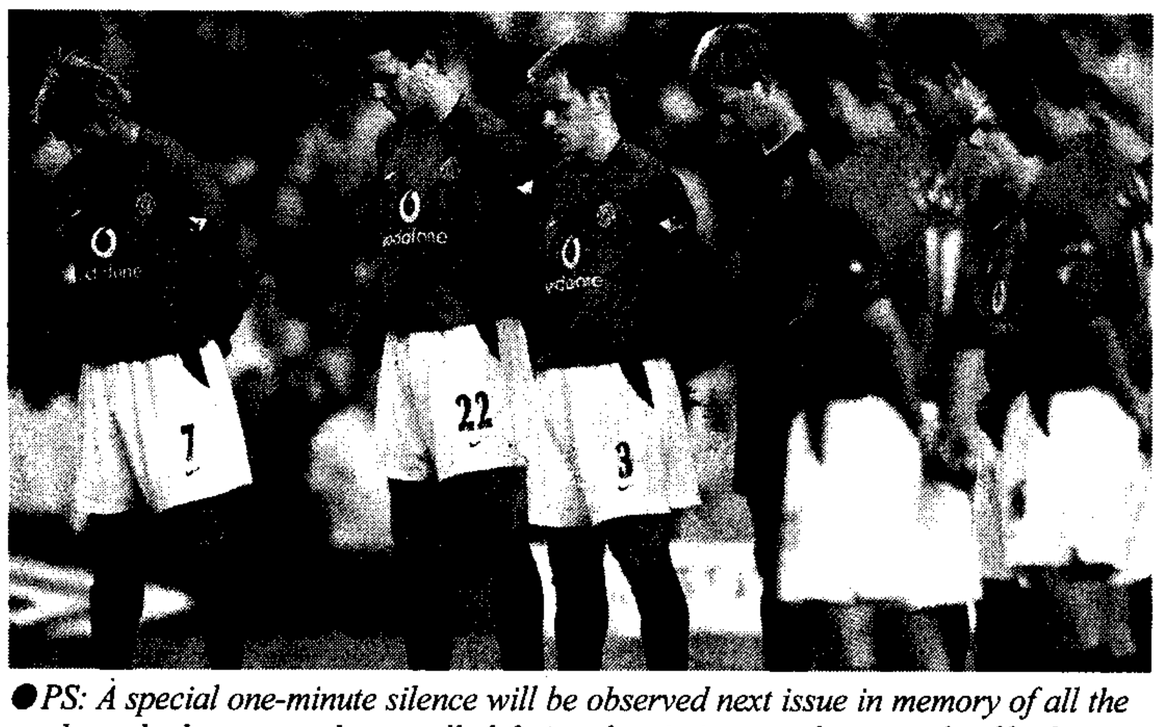
THE EXPRESS is offering a million-pound reward to itself if any members of the public would like to buy the newspaper and increase its sales.

If you even think that you might want to buy this sort of newspaper, then that could be vital information for our marketing department. We suspect that putting in blanket coverage of the recent horrific murders in Soham will lead to more readers. But we cannot be sure.

Only *you* can help us to find the truth. And £1 million will be our reward.

● **Call Express Newspapers at once and hear the coroner denounce us for interfering in a police inquiry.** *(Surely "Tell us what you like about the new Daily Excess"? Ed.)*

SILENCE FOR VICTIMS OF ROY KEANE



● *PS: A special one-minute silence will be observed next issue in memory of all the readers who have recently cancelled their subscriptions on the grounds of bad taste.*

The Victor Meldrew Quiz

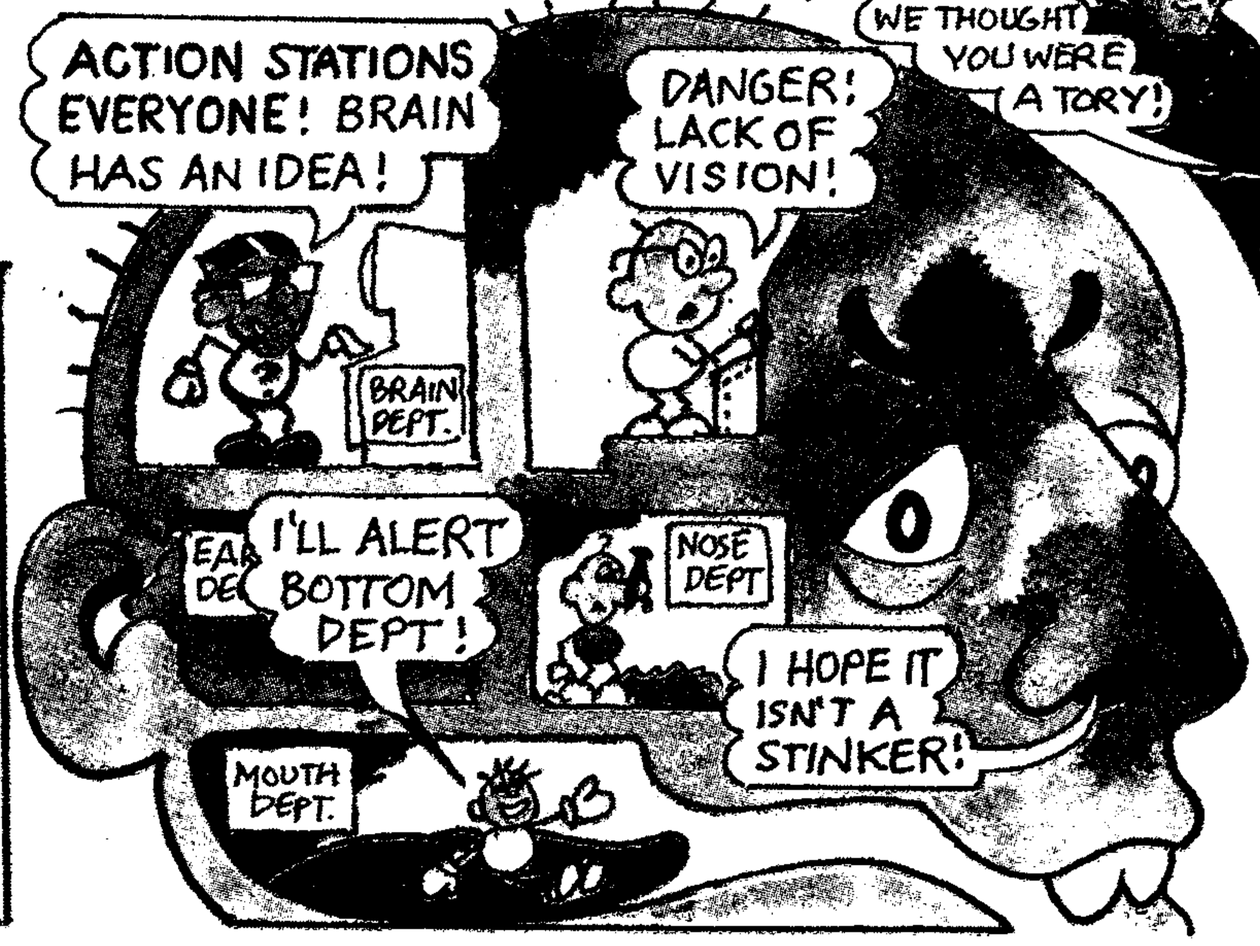
Are You
A. Aged between 45 and 65?
B. Filled with furious rage about everything that happens?
C. Angry that you're stuck in a dead end job which is boring and repetitive?
D. Fearful of anything new or anyone different to you?
E. So desperate for the Tories to get back in power you invent a new category of imaginary voters to vote for them?

If you answered YES to all these questions then you're definitely a PAUL DACRE and you are editing the Daily Mail.

© Daily Maildrew and then all other papers

THE HAS-BEANO

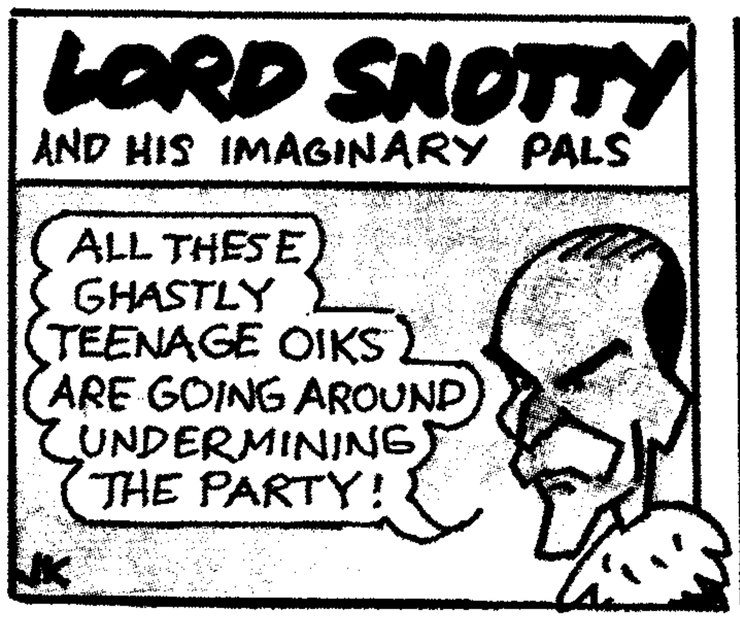
The NUMSKULL



INTRODUCING DESPERATE ALAN

MICHAEL THE DODGER

LORD SNOTTY AND HIS IMAGINARY PALS



BORIS THE MENACE

BORIS! YOU'D MAKE A GREAT LEADER OF OUR GANG!
CRIPES! BLIMEY! YIKES! OO-ER DO YOU THINK SO?
YES YOU'RE EVEN MORE OF A COMIC FIGURE THAN DUNCAN SMITH!

Daily Mail

COMMENT

A Disgraceful Act of Treachery

THERE IS nothing more sickening than the sight of this middle-aged man cynically making money by peddling treasonable tittle-tattle about the late Princess Diana.

What makes it worse is the spurious moral justification offered by this traitor that his seedy revelations are somehow in the public interest.

And how dare he suggest that the young princes would benefit from reading such tawdry rubbish about their mother.

The fact is that this grubby muckraker is a national disgrace who has set out to destroy Diana's reputation for personal gain.

But enough of me. That Ken Wharfe is pretty awful too.

© *All other newspapers as well*

On Other Pages

ANNE LAZILY's Brilliant New Series "Diana: Five Thousand Words On" – **7, 8, 9, 10**

"We don't want to know about Diana's vibrator, thank you" says **PHIL SPACE** – **11, 12, 13, 14**

"It's time to let her rest in peace" says **PHILLIPA PAGE** – **14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20**

POLICE CARNIVAL – A HUGE SUCCESS

By Our Crime Staff **Phil Streets**

EUROPE'S largest police carnival was this year voted "a greater success than ever", as more than 100,000 members of the Metropolitan Police paraded through the streets of London's Notting Hill over the Bank Holiday weekend.

Members of the public were delighted at the spectacle of London's entire police force, arrayed in their colourful blue uniforms, laughing, singing and dancing through the streets.

Many of the officers joked with the crowd in their distinctive street-wise patois, with such quips as "watch it, sonny", and "we know where you live".

Carnival of the Pigs

After the eight-hour-long parade of the uniformed policemen came a more informal display as plain-clothes detectives wandered through the crowd disguised as Rastafarians, drug-peddlers and trans-sexual limbo dancers.

Said Inspector "Knacker of the Yard" Knacker, "It was a great day – only marred by the fact that there was no one to arrest."

"But all the lads had a very good overtime."

DRIVING TOO FAST SHOW

NORTHERN IRELAND'S CAPTAIN IS FORCED TO RETIRE
THE ORANGES CONTINUE TO POSE A BIG THREAT
I'M GOING TO SHOOT!
IN THE HEAD BOY!
HE'S SENDING HIMSELF OFF BEFORE HE GETS INJURED!
YOU'RE GONNA GET YOUR FUCKIN' HEAD BLOWN OFF!
J PORTER

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

BARRY NORMAN

You've met all the Hollywood greats in your career as Britain's leading film expert. Did spoons feature in any of your encounters?

Well, there was the time that Elizabeth Taylor insisted on giving me a spoon to stir my cofee during my famous interview with her for Film '78 after she made *Love In Florida* with Charlton Heston and Peter Sellers. In my view, it was very underrated by all the other critics, but Liz was good enough to tell me that I was the only one who'd understood it. They don't make film stars like that any more...

And what about spoons? Do you think they are not as good as they were?

Of course. That goes for everything nowadays. Just think of the wonderful spoons one used to see on the screen in the great days of Ealing and Pinewood. Who can ever forget the scene in David Lean's *Oliver Twist* where young Oliver, played of course by the young Anthony Newley, banged on his plate with a spoon and shouted, "More means worse"?

What do you think is the BBC's record on spoons?

Well, of course, the BBC isn't what it was. When I left the BBC, after 50 years as one of their most successful presenters, they couldn't even be bothered to give me a decent present, not even a commemorative spoon saying "Good luck, Barry, with your new job at Sky TV".

Did Sky give you a leaving spoon when they let you go?

No.

And why not?

Are you trying to make fun of me? I never said "And why not?" It was something made up by Rory Bremner. I don't want to go on about it, but it's all in my book, called *And Why Not?* It's all there. All the people who've let me down and betrayed me – Kirk Douglas, Stanley Baxter, Doris Day, Marmaduke Hussey, Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe, Cecil B. de Mille, D.W. Griffiths. I knew them all, you know. They all turned on me in the end.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

So. Back with you next week with another crop of films. And why not?

NEXT WEEK: "Me And Other People's Spoons" by Mohamed al-Fugger.

From the pen that gave you Heir Of Sorrows and La Dame Aux Camillas

Forbidden Alliance

by Dame Sylvie Krin

THE STORY SO FAR: It is five years since Diana died, and so much has changed in Charles's world.

Now read on..

"IT REALLY is appalling!" Charles threw down the Review section of the Sunday Times in disgust, and addressed the empty breakfast room at Highgrove.

"Why do they have to keep printing this rubbish year after year?"

There it was in black and white. The *whole sordid* story of his marriage to Diana, raked over yet again.

The tantrums. The traumas. The flagrant infidelities. The whole ghastly business.

And now her former bodyguard had joined in, repeating again every last drop of poisonous tittle-tattle from the "years of torment", as he had come to think of them.

He looked at the 18th century Ernst and Saunders longcase clock and saw that it was only 10.30. Perhaps a little too early in the day for what his father called "a snifter".

"But why not?" he thought. After all, his great-great-grandfather would have got through a whole case of champagne by this time of the morning.

He strode determinedly across the room to the solid gold drinks cabinet built in the shape of the Taj Mahal, a wedding present from the Emir of Tat, and poured himself a stiff shot of McHackey's Old Grouse.

As the potent restorative coursed through his veins, Charles began to feel more at ease with the day.

He looked musingly out of the window as the golden light of late summer slanted over the impeccably manicured organic lawns and caught the leaves of the great bulimia tree as they turned from verdant green to an autumnal amber.

"That's how life is," he thought. The hot storms of summer giving way to the calm, reflective tranquillity of autumn.

As his old friend and mentor Sir Laurens van der Post had put it so succinctly while they were sitting round the campfire in the Matahari Desert, "Life begins at 50." How true that was, how very, very true.

And how fortunate he was that all that ghastly period of his earlier life was now receding into the distant past.

The memories came flooding back. What a fool he had been!

He should have known from the start what it would be like, from the day Diana moved in and threw all his cherished Goon Show LPs into the wastepaper basket.

That's how their marriage had been, right up to the day it ended. She had glorified in defying him in everything she did.

He could almost hear her mocking voice now, echoing down the years.

"I don't care what you say, Charles! I shall do whatever I want. You can't tell me what to do. You're not even King..."

"YOU CAN'T tell me what to do. You're not even King!" The commanding presence of his beloved, Camilla, stood before him in blood-spattered jodhpurs and muddy riding boots, her face flushed from a long day in the saddle with the Earl of Cirencester's foxhounds.

She took a long defiant drag on a Goldman and Sachs full-strength cigarette, well knowing how annoyed he would be at her flagrant breach of his "no smoking in my presence" rule.

"Now look here, Camilla," he coughed, as the billows of acrid smoke assailed his sensitive royal nostrils. "If you go on this Countryside March thingie, you've no idea what an awkward position it would put me in.

"The tabloids would have my guts for garters," he explained. "I mean, they'll say that I gave you permission to go, and that I was endorsing the whole political, you know, thingie..."

Camilla tapped impatiently on an ample thigh with her Butler and Sloss riding crop.

"I don't need your permission to do anything, Charles!" she shouted. "We're not even married, in case you hadn't noticed.

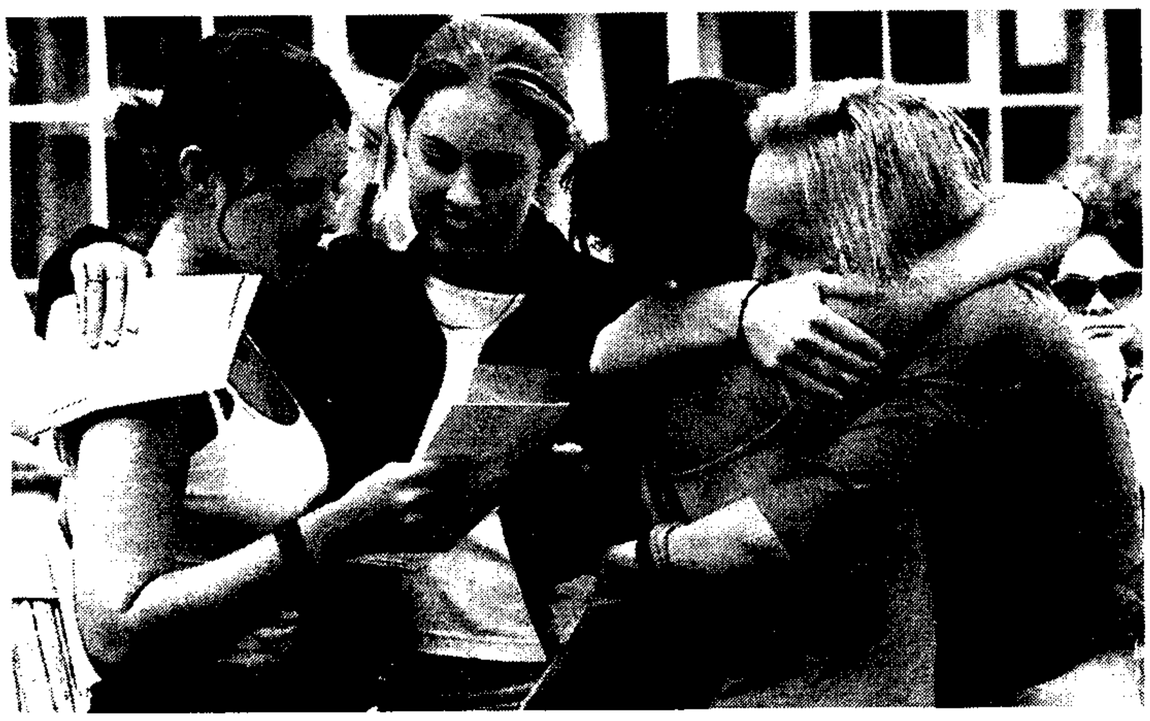
"And when did you ever worry about interfering in politics? Every day you come up with another daft speech about organic prayer books or GM architects or something else you know nothing about.

"Other people might be scared of you, Charles, but not me. I'm going on that march and that's an end to it!"

She spun on her heel and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her, a sound that echoed down the corridors of his memory to all those other slammed doors in the past.

Outside in the growing dusk the first leaves of autumn fluttered to the ground, harbingers of the cold winter that was to come...

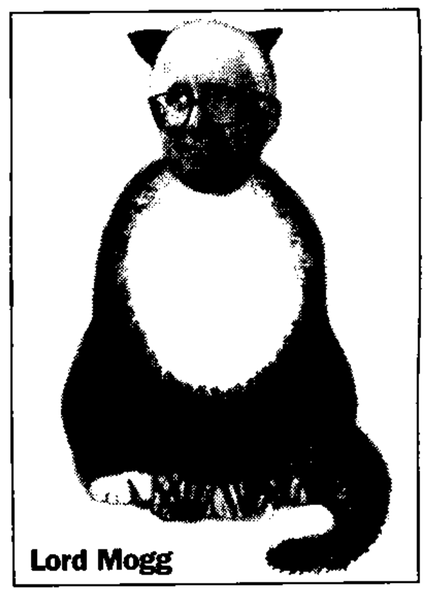
© *Sylvie Krin Airport Romance Series.* Enjoy excerpts from her other best-selling titles at www.krintrash.com



The girls of St Crumpets celebrate record A-Level results. These four girls between them have got 500 Grade A*s. Said the Editor of the Daily Telegraph, "I am delighted for our readers that these girls are so attractive. It's a shame that they aren't showing more leg like Gwyneth Paltrow last Friday. Still phwoar, eh?"

Mog to be 'put to sleep'

By Our Literary Editor
Cat Adie



Lord Mogg

THE MUCH-LOVED children's character created by Rupert Murdoch is to be "put to sleep" after a lifetime of putting other people to sleep. *(Surely 'entertaining children of all ages from ninety to ninety-five'? Ed.)*

The forgetful Mog has featured in hundreds of charming stories, including "Mog And The Importance Of The Gold Standard", "Mog And The Imminent Return Of The Ice Age", "Mog And The Upside-Down Graph", "Mog Has Lunch At The Garrick", "Mog Has Lunch At The Garrick Again", and "Mog Remembers Diana".

Said creator Mr Murdoch, "Mog has had a good run, and has delighted several generations of fans with his good natured incompetence. But we now feel that in the 21st century it is time to move on."

Lord Mogg is 106.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Dean Riesner, Screenwriter

So. Farewell then
"Dinky" Dean Riesner,
No one had
Ever heard of
You.

But you wrote
The immortal
Lines

"Do you feel lucky?"
Well do you.
Punk?"

And "Go ahead
Make my day"

You always
Made mine

When I saw
Clint deliver
Your catchphrases.

E.J. "Dirty" Thribb,
(17½ Precinct)

Is The Telegraph Getting Too Thin?

Asks Liz Hurley

EVER since I gave birth to a new baby I have noticed that the Daily Telegraph has been getting thinner and thinner.

Once a heavyweight newspaper, it is now looking dangerously waif-like and reports suggest that it has been on a desperate non-stop diet of pieces about myself.

This is not enough to sustain a healthy newspaper and if the Telegraph continues in this fashion, shedding readers, it could collapse and *(cont. p. 94)*

On Other Pages
Earth Summit Latest – Starving Millions Lose Weight Too **94**

St Cakes Delays Beginning of Term

By Our Education Staff **John Scare**

THE PRESTIGIOUS Midland independent boarding school St Cakes (Motto: Quis Paget Entrat – "Who Pays Gets In") has been forced to postpone the opening of Sodom Term due to the Government insistence on checks being run on staff by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Said Headmaster Mr Kipling, "These routine checks are a menace. All they do is reveal that most of my staff have criminal records. I will be forced to find replacements which will prove costly and time consuming. This is political correctness gone mad."

BUSH EVOKES CHURCHILLIAN SPIRIT

That Earth Summit Menu in full

Waffle

– ✻ –

Tripe

– ✻ –

Baloney

– ✻ –

Junket

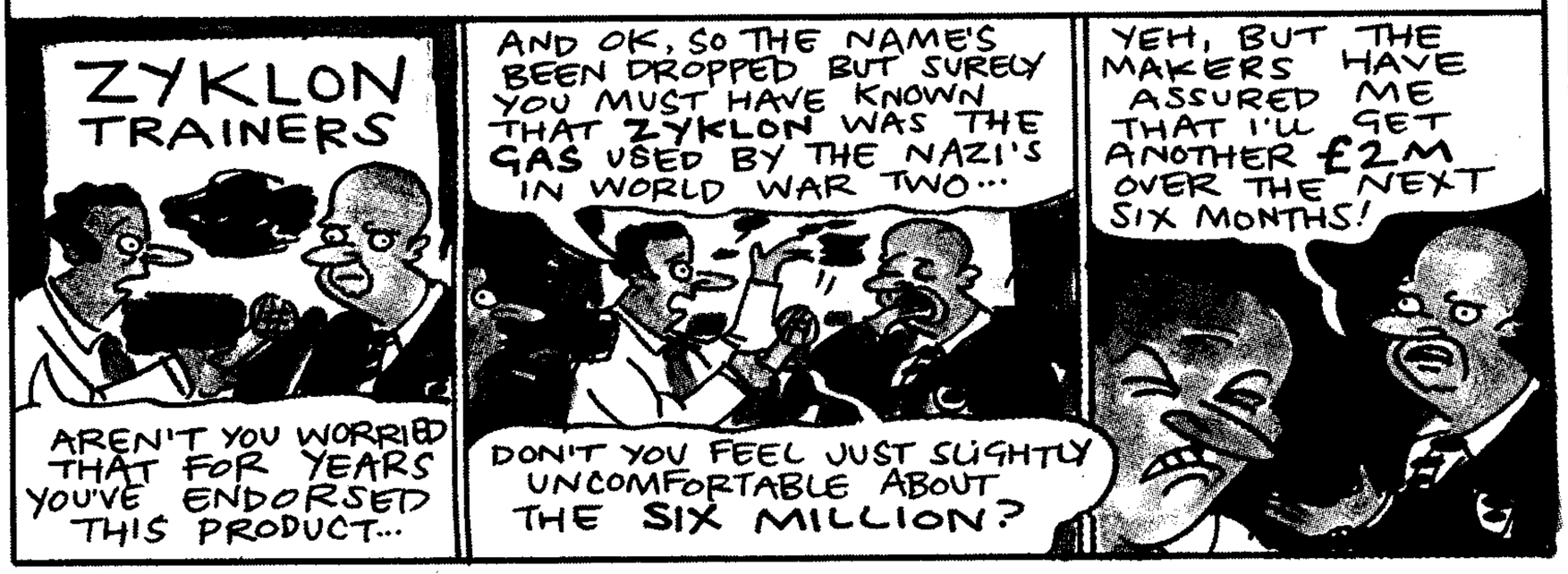
– ✻ –

Greens (off)

To drink: *No water*

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD


ZYKLON TRAINERS
AREN'T YOU WORRIED THAT FOR YEARS YOU'VE ENDORSED THIS PRODUCT...
AND OK, SO THE NAME'S BEEN DROPPED BUT SURELY YOU MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT ZYKLON WAS THE GAS USED BY THE NAZI'S IN WORLD WAR TWO...
DON'T YOU FEEL JUST SLIGHTLY UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THE SIX MILLION?
YEH, BUT THE MAKERS HAVE ASSURED ME THAT I'LL GET ANOTHER £2M OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS!

DIARY

MARTIN AMIS

I am a serious.

It is novels that I usually write: what I usually write is novels. And you know why I write? I write to fill the chiliastic lacuna of the aberrant psychotheatre in my headipops.

And it all adds up to one thing.

I am a serious.

Iosif Stalin. Beast and Monster. Mass-murderer. What do we need to call him? What is it necessary to call him? Stalin is too simple: too simperbubble. In considering our selection of an appropriate word, I must first contend that the simple word "Stalin" does nothing to convey the guy's sheer horrid horridity. Let's think again: let's reinvent the language to form a noose around his head.

Mister Walrus Whiskers. That just about does the trick. I can candidly argue that, following a great deal of research, I know he wouldn't want to be called Mr W-W: not one little bit. Or what about "Starling"? No way, Jose Feliciano. It sounds too like a bird: and a bird he was most certainly not.

The guy hated flying: hated it. Nor can we call him by his matey primonomenclaturalition, which is, of course, Iosif: Iosif is no mate of mine.

And why, pray, is it necessary to point out at this post-millenial juncture that Iosif Stalin – or Starling – is no mate of this 52-year-old male novelist? Or, to put it another way: *Novelist male old year 52 this of mate no is – Starling or – Stalin Iosif that juncture this at out point to necessary it is, pray, why and?*

It can here be stated, boldly and fearlessly: Iosif Stalin was a very bad man. And my contention goes further, and can herein be tersely stated: he wasn't nice at all.

Journey with me, if you will, back to 1974. The now-legendary offices of the *New Statesman*. Every major young writer and thinker in the world was by chance foregathered therein: Barnsey, Hitch, La Fent and my own good (I herewith employ the adjective in its post-Augustinian sense) self. Brazen young intellectuals, we would throw ideas around like frisbees, these frisbideas or ideabees swoop-swirling around the office and smashing coffee-cups before being caught and tossed back in the general direction – gendire – of myself, the original tosser.

Stalin – let's, for the sake of argumentables, call him Stalin – Stalin was mentioned in the intellectual ferment of those offices only once.

"Hey, Hitch," I gobspoke one day, reading a newsypaperium while Hitch was nibbing a characteristically finely-wrought yet deeply impassioned essay on the fraught situation on the Surrey/Sussex border (it was some years before he would discover South America), "Hey, Hitch – ever heard of a guy called Stalin?"

A moment's lacuna. A second's void. A sixtieth-of-a-minute's diaspora.

Then:

"Yeah! Stalin! I dig that one-hep crazy dude!"

It was not until the year AD 2000 that I discoverbubbled exactly how wrong Hitch was, and that Iosif Stalin – Walrus Whiskers – was in fact not nice at all.

Let me repeat that.

Not.

Nice.

At.

Allipegs.

Trotsky. Trotski. Half his name sounds like a horse. The other half is a mass-produced brand of fruit-flavoured yoghurt.

So henceforth and heretowith, it is, I would contend, both tempting and appropriate, in this day and age, all things considered, to call him....Comrade Horse-Yoghurt.

Was Comrade Horse-Yoghurt as evil as Walrus Whiskers? Was he? And how do both of them compare to Adolf Hitler, whom reputable historians correctly identify as the German Chancellor from 1933-1945?

Put it this way: put it this way. On an Evil Scale of one-to-ten, in the cold light of day (never colder than when night beckons) how do these three men – Horse-Yoghurt, Walrus Whiskers, and Adolf Littler (he was half an inch smaller than the other two) rate?

This is my reckoning, my total, my final score count-up, on the Scale of Evil:

H.Y. Trotsky: 7 out of 10

A.L. Hitler: 9 out of 10

W.W. Stalin: 10 out of 10.

So I would contend, gentlemen, that from this chart, it is indeed necessary to conclude that the overall winner – not just evil, but mega-evil, and not just mega-evil but megaleggahegga evil – is W.W. Stalin. By at least ten per cent.

How to register the size, the immensity, the extent of his evil? Exertions of the imagination are called for.

Imagine a blank piece of paper. White: white. Very, very, white.

Now imagine an ink-blot: a black ink-blot.

And there you have it. Iosif Stalin. Evil as an ink-blot.

Or – imagine it – still more evil: more eviller still.

I am a serious.

Wherever he is now – and one sincerely hopes and trusts that he is at present floundering in the darkest reaches of Hell, doubtful though the actuality of that post-life domicile may be – then I hope Stalin has read these words, these sentences, these paragraphs and chapters, and finally this book, of mine.

And I further hope this: this I further hope.

I hope the guy feels thoroughly ashamed of himself.

A theory: a theory of mine. Stalin, Walrus Whiskers, Koba the Dread, whatever, actively enjoyed being not just evil but deeply unpleasant. He gorged on unpleasantness, on not-niceness, like a bear feeds on wild berries or an antelope feeds on mice (check).

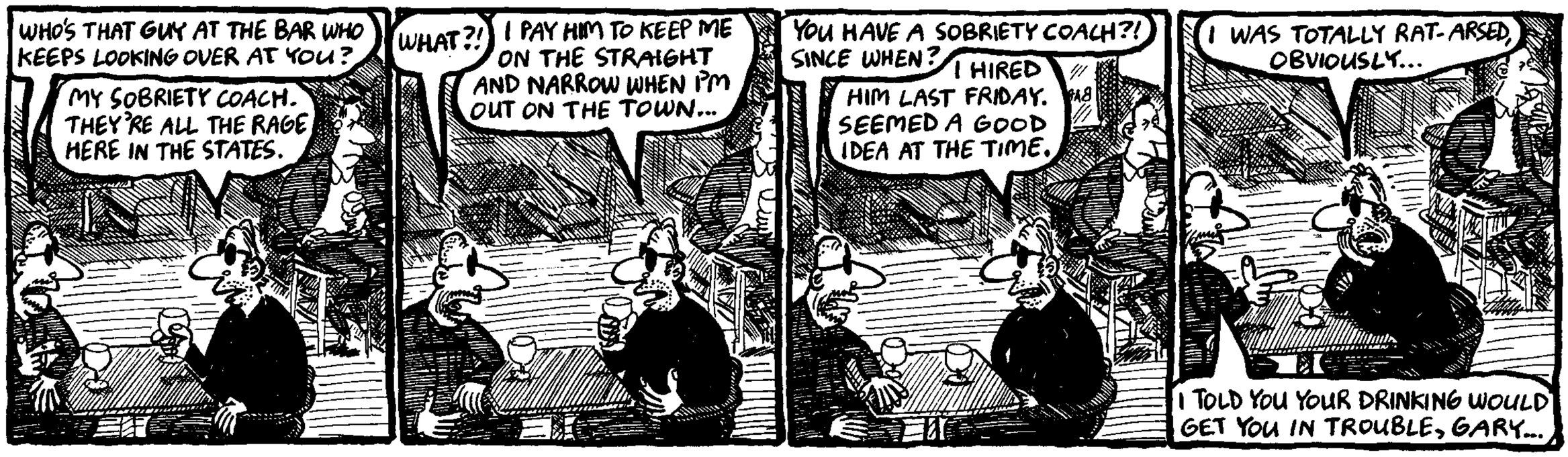
So, there we have it, Comrade Hitch (if I may)! You were wrong: I am right. I am right: you are wrong. But no hard feelings, emotions, thought-yelps. Next time you're over, let's slurp down a few alco-jars at the local hostelry. But, if you don't mind let's on no account (no: account) invite Comrade Stalin!

Yours ever,
Martin Serious

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


WHO'S THAT GUY AT THE BAR WHO KEEPS LOOKING OVER AT YOU?
MY SOBRIETY COACH. THEY'RE ALL THE RAGE HERE IN THE STATES.
WHAT?!
I PAY HIM TO KEEP ME ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW WHEN I'M OUT ON THE TOWN...
YOU HAVE A SOBRIETY COACH?! SINCE WHEN?
I HIRED HIM LAST FRIDAY. SEEMED A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME.
I WAS TOTALLY RAT-ARSED, OBVIOUSLY...
I TOLD YOU YOUR DRINKING WOULD GET YOU IN TROUBLE, GARY...

Literary Review

Sibling rivalry

A Whistling Woman
A.S. Byatt
(Chatto & Windus, £16.99)
The Seven Sisters
Margaret Drabble
(Viking, £16.99)

BACK in the spring of 1990, shortly before publication of A.S. Byatt's international mega-seller *Possession* (film opening almost as we speak), a young journalist was despatched to interview her for one of the broadsheets.

Barely had the young man hung up his jacket in la Byatt's commodious Putney vestibule than his hostess fixed with him with the steeliest of smiles and announced: "I'll take one question about Maggie." Here at the height of the poll tax riots, with the prime minister's position looking none too secure, it took a few seconds to establish that she meant Drabble rather than Thatcher.

Quite what went on in the wartime Sheffield nursery tenanted by the two elder daughters of Mr Justice Drabble, then of His Majesty's northern circuit, we shall probably never know; but the consequences lie strewn all over recent English literature. They first became apparent nearly half a century ago on the verdant lawns of Cambridge where brainy Antonia (Newnham scholarship, subsequent First in English) could be heard lamenting the fact that, formidable though her abilities might be, she had this younger sister who. . .

And so, albeit protemporaneously, it turned out. Ant married a don called Ian Byatt and went off to have children (the miseries of which experience, when what you *really* want to do is write books, are reproduced in practically every novel she has since written.) Mags, though, did even better – scooped a Double First, married the actor Clive Swift and instantly embarked on a career as a modish lady novelist. And what, you might ask, did she write about? Well, notwithstanding a few excursions into adultery and metropolitan modes, *sisters*.

A Summer Bird-Cage (1963), for example, features Sarah, who inhabits a London bedsit, and gorgeous Louise, married to a rich but nasty writer. As the original Penguin blurb-writer put it, "Louise and Sarah... have to discover whether they can really forgive each other for existing."

You get the idea? Two years later came *The Millstone*, one of whose high-points emerges when cool, brainy Rosamund, about to

give birth to an illegitimate baby, gets a somewhat less than sympathetic letter from her sister Beatrice. Cue a series of childhood reminiscences set in – well I never did – Sheffield. Not to be outdone, Ant – her own fictional career chugging along at a slightly slower rate – countered with *The Game* (1967) featuring – yes – two sisters, one an intense, brainy Oxford don, the other a rather trivially-minded women's issue novelist, whose irresponsibility (putting sis in a book) leads indirectly to her sibling's suicide.

And so it went on. *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and *Still Life* (1985), the first two tranches of the quartet which *A Whistling Woman* now concludes, introduced Stephanie Potter (nice, reflective, clever) and her sharper but, we are given to understand, less amiable and not *quite* so clever younger sister Frederica. Again the older sister dies, this time the victim of a defective fridge.

Curiously, at this point each of these careers shunted off in the opposite direction. Ant, after a quarter of a century's modest returns, found herself acclaimed as the great English lady novelist of the age; Mags' attempt to broaden her range by writing state-of-the-nation panoramas (*The Radiant Way*, etc) caused great amusement among the critics. Worse, perhaps, was that her efforts to staunch this leakage consisted of, er, *trying to write like her sister*. Ant, famously, is keen on modern science, the DNA spirals, the roots of consciousness and so on. And what did Mags' last one, *The Pepper Moth* (2001), just happen to be about? Was it also set up north? Did it additionally annoy Ant by supposedly including a portrait of their mother?

And now here we are again, both of them publishing a novel in the same week (surely someone could have checked the dates; but then masochism has always played a large part in this relationship). Set in the radical 60s, Dame Ant's is, as usual, a massive, bristling opus full of people with unusual names (Luk Lysgaard-Peacock, Jacqueline Winwar), seriously brainy (digressions on the nature of language, etc) and covering, in no particular order, the memory processes of snails, new universities, the advent of television, religious cults, new universities and student uprisings.

The Seven Sisters, on the other hand, is a quiet little piece about a west London fiftysomething named Candida, dumped by her husband for a young chick, who by way of compensation sets about filling her life with modest pleasures and Mediterranean travel. As in her recent novels, with their surreptitious post-modern add-ons, there is a slight sense of someone trying to keep up.

Books & Bookmen

■ THE appearance of this year's notably low-key Booker longlist looks set to extinguish the slight flicker of interest raised in the prize by the recent transfer to its new sponsors, the faintly obscure City investment outfit Man.

Some months ago the judge's chairperson, Lisa Jardine, could be heard promising media chums an "unorthodox" selection of outsiders that would have the literary establishment gnashing its collective teeth. Oddly, what emerged was a dutiful collection of familiar faces and token gestures: an appearance from the media-friendly Zadie Smith (who has to be on prize shortlists even if her novel hasn't even been published yet); but also nods to deserving old-stagers (William Trevor, Anita Brookner) and evidence of fervent lobbying jobs (Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, hotly canvassed by *Times* lit ed and fellow judge Erica Wagner).

As for the shortlist, some smart money is on Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault*. Robert Edric's *Peacetime* is a promising long odds bet.

■ LORD Woy Jenkins, author of current bestseller *Churchill*, seems to be suffering selective memory lapses along with his publisher, Macmillan.

In a footnote on page 631, Woy asserted that the total number of civilians killed in the bombing raid over Birmingham on the night of 19-20 November 1940 was 1,353. The Birmingham Air Raids Remembrance Association contacted his lordship to point out that this figure, in fact, covered the total number of dead and injured. An appropriate donation to the Birmingham Air Raids Memorial Appeal was requested.

Since then the association has received a letter from Woy in which he admits: "I took the 'fact' from some highly reputable source (although I cannot now remember what it was), but I should have checked further. . . " Commendably honest, if vague, and slightly worrying for those who rely on this great historian for accuracy.

However, there appears to be no acknowledgement of the donation request. Macmillan, while thanking the association for bringing the error to light and promising that it will be corrected in the paperback, has also cocked a deaf 'un on the matter of the donation.

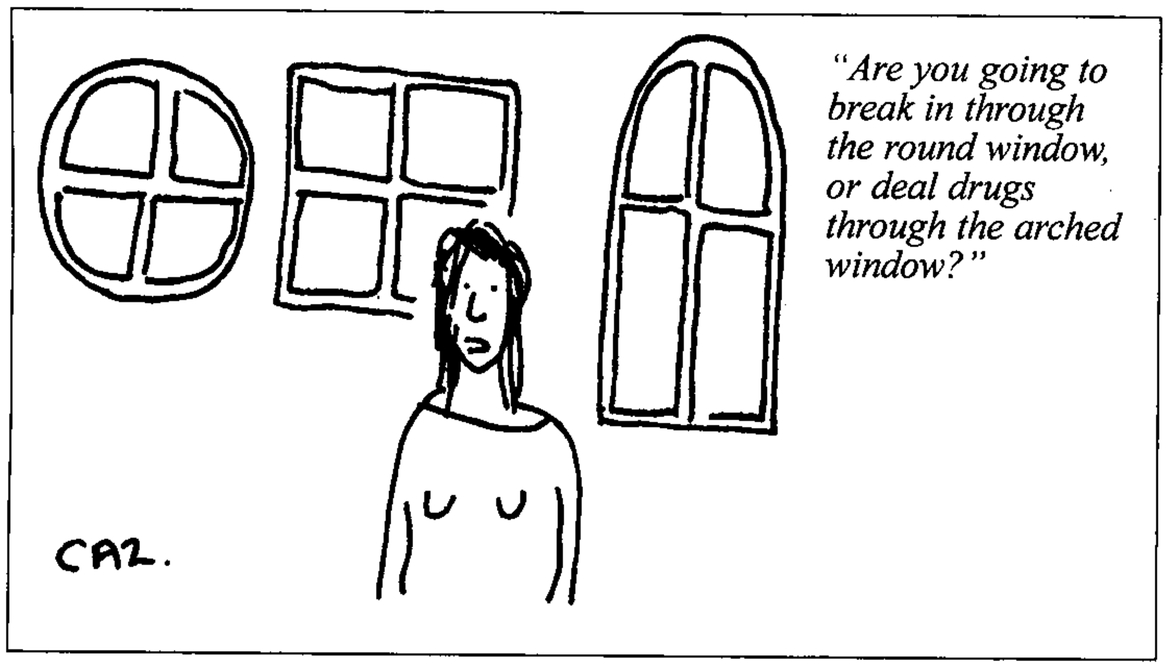
■ THE public lending right – the money paid to authors for public library borrowings of their books – is nothing but laudable, but questions are being raised about the existing system.

This year £4,505,758 of a total £5m government grant was paid out to 17,581 authors with the balance going on administration. Next year, the grant rises to £7m. Each author receives 2.67p per loan with a minimum qualifying payment of £5 and a ceiling of £6,000.

The £5 minimum means that many authors – some on the breadline who would be grateful for any amount of money, however small – receive nothing. Meanwhile blockbusters like JK Rowling receive a guaranteed six grand, which is little more than small change to them.

The problem is growing: next year, approximately £6m of the PLR grant will go to the minority of high-earning authors, leaving about £500,000 to be divided among the other 17,000 or so. Of course, the bestsellers should receive all they are due, but is there no way that some proportion of

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S MY OWN STORY IN MY OWN WORDS
£2 MILLION BECKHAM BOOK DEAL
AND WHAT ARE THOSE WORDS, DAVID?
CAN I HAVE A GHOST WRITER ?
£2 BECKHAM BOOK DEAL



"Are you going to break in through the round window, or deal drugs through the arched window?"

PLR money could be kept back specifically for the poorest authors, to whom it would really make a difference?

■ HISTORY is repeating itself at reissue specialist House of Stratus, it would appear.

Last summer, the original company Stratus Holdings PLC went into receivership, owing millions of pounds to authors, agents and print machinery suppliers. Last October, the assets were bought from the receivers at a knockdown price by House of Stratus Ltd – a company run by David Lane, the man who had founded the original Stratus and run it into the ground (see *Eyes passim*).

The deal meant that Lane could carry on trading, unencumbered by his massive debts, and that the poor sods who were owed by the old company had to carry on dealing with him if they were to have any hope of seeing any cash. That slender hope has receded. The new company has gained a reputation as the worst payer in publishing; and the same authors, agents and manufacturers are owed even more.

Of the agents, Curtis Brown is understood to be the worst hit, having several major authors' estates to Stratus, including John Buchan. The Society of Authors is also thought to be a major creditor of the company. Will it be long before the receivers are called in again?

'Bookwork'

Market farces

Across the Nightingale Floor

Lian Hearn

(Pan Macmillan, £12.99)

THIS is the story of an Australian author named Gillian Rubinstein. Gillian had been muddling along quite nicely as a veteran writer of children's books – 30 or so at the last count, with big shiny pictures and names like *Space Demons* and *The Giant's Tooth*. Then Gillian had a good idea. Why not make lots of money?

So she rather ingeniously took a long hard look at every other author who's made lots of money in recent years, and followed their formula. The one problem remaining was that in Australia Gillian Rubinstein was a name associated with masterworks like the *Spacemaze* trilogy. So Gillian reverted to her childhood nickname, 'Lian, changed her sex and her surname and got her Melbourne agent to "discover" her anew. The result? Mr Lian Hearn was soon at the centre of a bidding war for what had now become a trilogy and publishing rights were sold to 25 countries for the best part of £5m.

With that kind of money slopping around, it fell to the marketing men to deliver the kind of promotional rumpus that might distract us from trifling matters like "is it any good?" They did not disappoint. In Australia, a feng shui consultant was hired. He decreed that the book should be made four pages longer and specified an auspicious date for its release. Hacks were sent proofs wrapped in rice paper and ribbon. Puff-pieces duly began oozing from on-message critics. The obligatory film rights were sold to Universal for a further $3m with the promise that this was the kind of failsafe franchise with the longevity of a *Police Academy* and the worldwide appeal of a *Star Wars*.

But much to the chagrin of slavering publishers everywhere, one thing the bookworld has not yet managed to dispense with is books. And so having swallowed the sales pitch, bought the T-shirt and sucked the promotional lollipop long and hard, finally we have a chance to see what all the fuss was about.

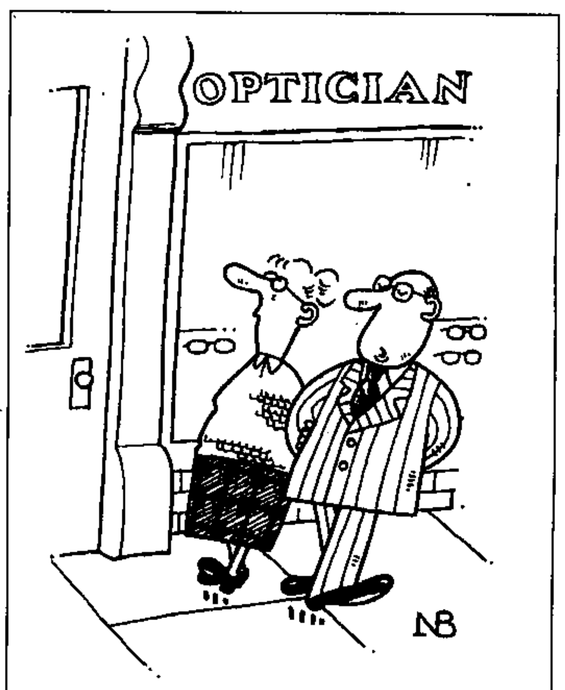
Across the Nightingale Floor is the first part in a trilogy that has already been pre-ordained as this year's publishing sensation. Pan claims it is set to "transcend the barriers of the fiction market" which is true if you consider that the main barrier in the fiction market is about 5,000 copies and that many have already been given away.

The parallels between Ms Hearn's novel and the two other crossover success stories of the last decade – Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and J.K. Rowling's Potter escapades – are simply overwhelming. Like them, *Across the Nightingale Floor* looks to straddle both the adult and children's market, the dream-ticket when it comes to hitting those numbers. The plot concerns an orphan boy with a scar who has special powers; but Hearn has dutifully changed his name from Harry to Takeo. The story follows Takeo as he looks to revenge the death of his parents at the hands of a dark overlord named Iida. So far, so Potter. To keep things interesting the ambience is pure Pullman – a bit of magic and the occasional dalliance with serious issues. It is a succulent feast of unoriginality, but it worked for them, so. . .

Even leaving the Rowling/Pullman comparisons aside, it's still hard to pick out any shred of innovation beneath the replication. Takeo's "journey" is humdrum picaresque with several obvious teen-dream precursors – he is Luke Skywalker (imbued with hidden powers, belonging to a clandestine, Jedi-esque order); he is the Karate Kid (trained in martial arts by a mysterious mentor); he is Frodo Baggins (an unassuming little chap faced with a momentous task and a portentous future).

Rubinstein's hook is to set all these very familiar topoi in an unfamiliar realm — we are in a proto-medieval Japan of warring fiefs, autumn rains and lugubrious ritual. Yet even this is a flagrant marketing sop, jumping on the oriental mysticism bandwagon that had all America hailing "Easterns" as the new Westerns after *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

But hang on a minute – swords, sorcery, far-off lands, mysticism – previously this sort of thing wasn't a "unique publishing event", it was just called fantasy, a much-maligned tranche of genre fiction. Teenagers loved it and it always sold more than the rest of the list put together. Only recently have publishers divined that fantasy in the right clothes might appeal to a new audience, get some reviews and win some prizes.



"The eye-test has got easier – far more people are wearing glasses these days"

Pseuds Corner

If your house were on fire, which three things would you rescue?
My negatives, my camera and the fire. I'd take the fire with me; it would be like carrying a passion.

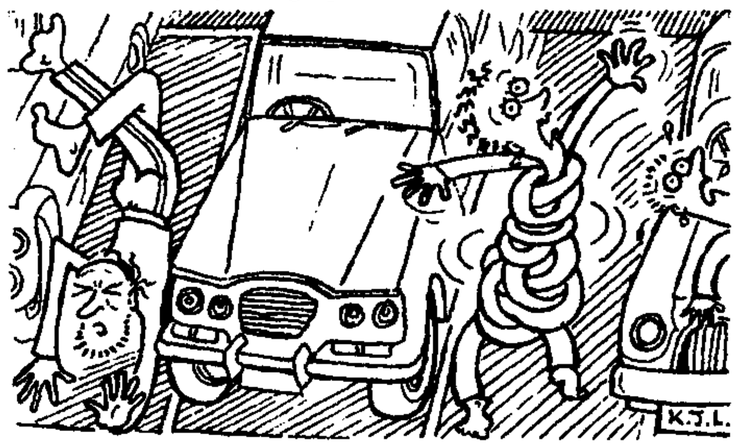
DAVID BAILEY
'My London' questionnaire,
Evening Standard

Jennifer Lopez's popularity and inspirational qualities make her a global icon that women of all ages aspire to. Jennifer Lopez has become a movement, a lifestyle. She represents a style and energy that will be expressed through every aspect of the fragrance product. Jennifer Lopez represents an exciting new addition to our portfolio of living brands.

BERND BEETZ, CEO of Coty Inc, on the launch of the 'highly anticipated' Jennifer Lopez fragrance, press release

What marks him [comedian Daniel Kitson] out is the forcefulness of his insistence on being true to himself. He represents a sanitising throwback to an old-fashioned individualism, flaunting an amused, reactionary aloofness towards the off-the-shelf identities of modern consumer society.

DOMINIC CAVENDISH
Daily Telegraph



In Paid and Displayed the artist [Hayley Newman] and her collaborators paid their £1.60 entrance fee to a multi-story car-park, then each found a separate parking space to lie down in and "begin our various internal transformations".

Guardian

I mention Samuel Beckett's Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, which, startlingly, he hasn't read.

BRYAN APPLEYARD interviewing
Sir Tom Stoppard, *Literary Review*

Pseuds Corporate

The Court has taken a significant amount of work with DMR Consulting with a view to introducing a Benefits Realization™ approach to the Court. Benefits Realization has been defined as "a business oriented framework supported by a set of processes, techniques and instruments which enables organisations to select and manage a portfolio of programs such that benefits are clearly defined, optimised and harvested."

DIANNE CARLOS, Chief Financial Officer of the Family Court of Australia,
***Courtside* magazine**

CONTRIBUTORS: Matt Cogger, Andy Long, Matthew Moxon, Eric Shanes, William Bland, Rob O'Neill.

IN THE BACK

A TAX COLLECTION

1. The Piggy Bank

HAS anyone been able to decipher that ridiculous television advertisement in which the actor Samuel L. Jackson walks down a road reciting a silly ditty about pigs going to market?

The theme seems to be that people who go to market without proper advice put themselves in grave danger. The ad drags on until all is suddenly revealed by the single word "Barclays". The message is plain: if you have any trouble with the complexities of the market, Barclays will put you right.

Sadly there is no mention in the ad of a complicated high court tax case that was decided on 22 July and featured the purchase of a pipeline from the Irish Gas Board by a Barclays subsidiary, Barclays Mercantile Finance.

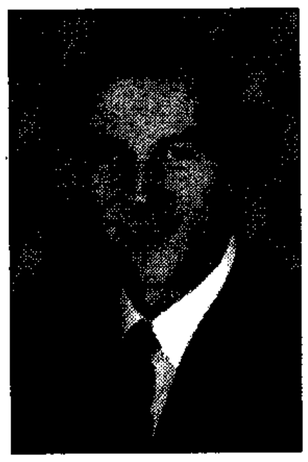
The price of the pipeline was £91m, but the money never crossed the Irish Sea. It went to Jersey instead, where it was paid into the secret account of another Barclays subsidiary. So Barclays paid out nothing. The pipeline was then leased back to the Irish Gas Board. So the bank kept its money and the Irish Gas Board kept its pipeline.

The transaction did nothing at all. But Barclays had the nerve to claim that its subsidiary should get "capital allowances" on the costs of the phantom sale. This would have generated a tax saving for the bank on the full costs of running the pipeline over five years – a sum in the order of £30m.

The scam was typical of the ingenious schemes constantly being devised by the best brains in the bank with the single purpose of cheating the taxpayer. Sadly for the bank – but luckily for all other taxpayers – the special commissioners saw through the scam and ruled it out. The bank could have crept away from the sleazy affair without any publicity, but its executives proved as greedy as any pig that ever went to market. Hopelessly enticed by the prospect of a £30m windfall from the taxpayer, they appealed against the commissioners to the high court.

Mr Justice Park scathingly dismissed the appeal. He observed: "The transaction was really about creating a complex and sophisticated structure… with the real end product being not the provision of finance at rates which were profitable to the provider and attractive to the recipient, but fiscal savings to be shared between the two of them and to be provided at the expense of the UK Revenue." In other words, the entire scam was a direct raid on the public purse.

It was first executed on 31 December 1993 when the chief executive of Barclays was Martin Taylor. When Labour was elected in 1997, Mr Taylor became one of the new government's favourite businessmen. No doubt impressed by the bank's prodigious attempt at cheating the taxpayer, the new chancellor Gordon Brown, only weeks after taking office, announced a "task force" on tax and benefits. He named the task force chairman as Martin Taylor. Mr Brown drooled: "I am delighted that Martin will lead this work. He will bring to it a first rate mind and ability to find practical solutions that make a long-term difference." Fortunately for taxpayers, whose interests are so prudently guarded by Gordon Brown, the long-term difference that Barclays hoped to achieve with its historic tax scam collapsed five years later.



Martin Taylor

One man who lost the case but gained a small fortune in the process was Barclays' distinguished QC, Graham Aaronson. Mr Aaronson represented the bank in front of the special commissioners and at the high court. "What took place," he argued, "was an ordinary finance lease transaction to be taxed and treated like any other." The judge did not agree. Next time such a complicated arrangement comes in front of the special commissioners, Mr Aaronson QC may well find himself sitting in judgment over it. In March this year he was appointed a deputy special tax commissioner and a part-time chairman of the VAT and Duties Tribunals.

Graham Aaronson QC

2. Marks and Nick's

NICK MONTAGU, boss of the Inland Revenue and former chief privatiser of British Rail, is very cross with *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies and his well-argued suggestion that the Revenue is showing special favours to big business tax avoiders.

Montagu wrote a self-serving piece in *The Tax Journal* defending the Revenue against Davies – and was terrifically chuffed when his line was taken up in a later issue by one of his big business friends, Philip Martin, senior tax manager at Marks & Spencer.

Under the satirical title A Victim Writes, Mr Martin sprang to the defence of Mr Montagu, his business-friendly executive David Hartnett and tax inspectors in general whom he described unctuously as "highly professional, courteous, firm but fair public servants".

He staunchly defended the idea that big business taxpayer clients like his employer should play a leading part in discussing ticklish tax problems with the Inland Revenue. "To partly misquote Aeschylus," he wrote, "while observance of the law must be rigid the law itself can be flexible."

Nick Montagu could hardly contain his delight. He dashed off an email to Philip Martin: "This is just a quick note to thank you very much for taking the time to do your article for *Tax Journal*. I am really very grateful: it obviously carries much more weight when somebody from a major company writes than when I, with all my defensive baggage, do. I also enjoyed the article – you can get away with an Aeschylus reference whereas I as a stereotyped mandarin cannot!"

The love-in continues!

3. False Dawn

INSPECTORS in the Inland Revenue's special compliance office, which deals with the most serious cases of tax evasion, recently set up a new unit which will use computer analysis to spot discrepancies in the tax returns of the very rich.

Succeeding in establishing such a unit at all was a considerable achievement among the ranks of senior Revenue management – but they ran into trouble when they tried to call it the "High Net Worth Individuals Unit". Paymaster-general Dawn Primarolo vetoed the name, fearful that it might send the message that the government was setting out to tax the rich, who might then fall out of love with Tony. So the Revenue has considerately renamed it the "Complex Personal Returns Unit" instead.

SUMMERTIME AN' THE LIVIN' IS ESA

NOTHING happens in parliament in the long summer holidays, but some select committees do manage to get their reports published. One such, on 22 August, was the public accounts committee's report on the amazing case of Joseph Bowden, a farmer and crook.

Mr Bowden filled his pockets by plundering the massive subsidies paid to farmers by the agriculture ministry (once MAFF, now DEFRA). Over a number of years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he swiped nearly a quarter of a million pounds from various government schemes. He was caught out by fluke when a government inspector sent to investigate a false claim happened to be the same man who had inspected his farms previously.

Mr Bowden was prosecuted in October 2000 and jailed for 30 months – the highest ever sentence in such a case. The judge was shocked and commented: "When one hears the extent to which the Common Agricultural Policy is used for cheating, one despairs."

A schedule to the PAC report shows that subsidies under all the agricultural and livestock schemes rose from £1.8bn in 1991-2 to £2.9bn in 2000-1. Of special interest to *Eye* readers were the figures for payments to farmers and landowners under the ESA (environmentally sensitive areas) scheme, which channels taxpayers' money into the pockets of farmers and landowners who manage not to disturb the environment. No area of government largesse has increased as sharply. In 1991-2, the taxpayer shelled out £11m, and in 2000-1 £72m.

Ever since the *Eye* revealed the case of the Duke of Richmond and his son the Earl of March, who obtained ESA grants for an environmentally sensitive area of their land on to which they were inviting fast and noisy motor cars to take part in a Festival of Speed, *Eye* countryside correspondents have warned us of the dangers of cronyism between the department and the farmers and landowners who are cheating it.

One disturbing aspect is the continued secrecy (or "confidentiality" as it is quaintly known) afforded landowners who are exposed as cheats. An exchange at the select committee highlighted this. Ian Davidson, Labour MP for Govan, asked Johnston McNeill, chief executive of the rural payments agency:

Q: The list of farmers who have cheated the system and have had to pay administrative penalties is listed somewhere is it?

A: No, it is not.

Q: Can you give us a list then, please, of people to whom administrative penalties have been applied?

A: Yes, certainly we can.

Earl of March

Or not. A note to Mr McNeill's answer directs the reader to an annexe to the report. This reveals that nearly 15,000 penalties were applied in 2000. But not a single name is published, so no one can know who the cheats are or how much the taxpayer lost.

After the *Eye*'s revelation in July that the Duke of Richmond and Earl of March had to stump up after the Festival of Speed fiasco, Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes, asked the environment minister Eliot Morley how much. He replied: "The Goodwood Estate Company Ltd [the duke and the earl] entered into an environmentally sensitive areas agreement in 1992. The area involved covered some 400 hectares. Some of the land, comprising less than 10 percent of this area, was subsequently used for other purposes. The department reclaimed the relevant proportion of ESA support from the company, plus interest."

Yes, but how much? The minister wouldn't say, so Mr Baker will ask again.

RAKE'S PROGRESS

THE dubious practices of American accountants are hard to detect in Britain. Proof of that is the proud statement of the new chairman of KPMG International, Mike Rake.

When he got the job in May, Mr Rake boasted: "KPMG is an organisation whose strength is its reputation for integrity and quality... we will do everything possible to lead the industry in restoring credibility to our profession." Mr Rake was unanimously appointed by the KPMG International board, probably because of his record as chairman of the UK branch of the firm, which started and has been built up in good old reliable Britain.

Mike Rake

But just a moment. Who was elected worldwide chief executive of KPMG at the same time? Step forward Robert W. Alspaugh, former deputy chairman and chief operating officer of KPMG in the US. In that role he must have played a leading part in supervising the audit of one of KPMG's richest clients, Xerox

In April, Xerox was fined $10m by the Securities and Exchange Commission, which explained: "From at least 1997 through 2000, Xerox Corporation defrauded investors. In a scheme directed and approved by its senior management, Xerox disguised its true operating performance by using undisclosed accounting manoeuvres, most of which were improper." As a result, the firm's income was overstated by about $3bn over four years.

These undisclosed accounting manoeuvres were approved by the auditors, KPMG, whose strength is its reputation for integrity and quality. As the SEC explained: "Xerox's reliance on accounting actions was so important to the company that when the engagement partner for the outside auditor (KPMG) challenged several of Xerox's accounting practices, Xerox's senior management told the audit firm that they wanted a new engagement partner assigned to the account. The audit firm complied."

Very much the same thing happened at Enron, which also objected to the commendable honesty of an engagement partner from its auditor, Arthur Andersen, and insisted on his replacement. Arthur Andersen meekly complied and had to put up with a lot of unfavourable publicity as a result. Arthur Andersen is based in the US. No such nasty publicity has been heaped on good old British KPMG, leaving it free to honour its new (British) chairman's pledge to lead the industry in restoring credibility to the profession.

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP

■ **IMMIGRATION:** Jacob Moyo, the unscrupulous immigration adviser who was reported for charging hapless Zimbabwean asylum seekers good money for bad advice that might have sent them back into the clutches of Robert Mugabe's thugs (Eyes passim), has finally been struck off.

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) acted after receiving complaints from the UK-based Zimbabwe Association against London-based Moyo, who used to work in Mugabe's government.

It was alleged that Moyo charged hundreds of pounds for services he failed to deliver or simply got wrong. In one case an asylum seeker who paid Moyo £800 found, in a statement prepared on his behalf, that he had been referred to as a woman, with the suggestion that he would be at risk of rape if returned to Zimbabwe.

The scandal is that Moyo was ever registered as an official adviser. A check on his background would have shown that when he arrived in the UK in 1998 he was allowed to stay for six months but had no right to reside or work. It was for making a false declaration to obtain registration that he was eventually struck off.

■ **HEP C:** Where pleas for a public inquiry into the bad blood scandals of the 70s and 80s – which saw thousands of people, mainly haemophiliacs, infected with deadly hepatitis C and HIV virus – have failed, perhaps Terence Grange, chief constable of Dyfed-Powys, will succeed.

He is investigating whether it would be possible to bring a criminal case against successive governments which ignored warnings about the dangers of contaminated blood.

More than 2,000 haemophiliacs have died and a further 4,000 are ill or dying as a result of being given infected blood. Successive governments have refused a public inquiry and given derisory compensation to those with HIV (and nothing to those with hep C).

In France and Japan criminal prosecutions have followed tainted blood scandals, and campaigning group Haemophilia Action UK has been told the crown prosecution service (CPS) is now being consulted to see if charges can be brought in this country.

Meanwhile the government has at last published its long-awaited strategy report on hep C, believed to be a factor in 5,000 deaths a year from cirrhosis and liver cancer. Those hoping the 50-page document would set out a programme to identify the hundreds of thousands who may be carrying the slow-burn, blood-born virus, treat them and prevent the spread of the disease are deeply disappointed though.

The strategy report is little more than a wish list calling for more research; testing for high risk groups like intravenous drug users; new treatment centres offering the latest anti-viral drugs (successful in about 60 percent of chronic infection cases); and the provision of social care and support for those living with chronic disease.

It doesn't address how, when or who is to pay; and it leaves most sufferers (government estimates there are 200,000; liver disease charities suggest 600,000) unaware that they are carrying the virus and many of those who are known and who are seriously ill still waiting for NICE, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, to approve the latest drug regime.

■ **LYNDE HOUSE:** The long-awaited report following allegations of neglect and suffering at Lynde House, a £600-a-week west London old people's home, has finally been published.

It catalogues a series of failures at the home then run by Westminster Healthcare, the company of Labour's favourite private health guru and party donor, Chai Patel.

The failures include a high level of falls and unexplained bruising among frail residents; delay in getting medical treatment for those presenting with acute clinical symptoms; poor prevention and treatment of pressure sores; emergency call bells out of reach or going unanswered; unacceptable lack of washing and grooming of residents; a failure to regularly change incontinence pads; poor staffing levels, unacceptable provision of equipment that did not meet health and safety or residents' need; inadequate standards of drugs administration and provision.

Eye readers will recall how residents were left for hours in their own waste; how they were left motionless for so long they developed pressure sores; and some residents went unshowered or bathed for weeks. Last month an inquest recorded an accidental death verdict on an elderly Lynde House resident who died after falling from a bath hoist while supposedly supervised by two staff.

Vincent Cable, the Lib Dem MP, had pushed for an inquiry after complaints to both the home and the former Kingston and Richmond health authority had been ignored. Last week's report criticised both for failing to implement a robust complaints procedure and failing to recognise the home's serious shortcomings.

Cable told the Eye: "It is absolutely clear that this extremely expensive home was not providing care for its frail and vulnerable residents to an acceptable standard. It is time for the company to emerge from its defensive culture of denial, to put up its hand and acknowledge its failings."

Sadly it does not appear to be doing so. Westminster Care succeeded in delaying publication of the report so that it could prepare a three-volume response refuting most of the report's findings.

BLOODY SUNDAY: THE WALLACE CORRECTION

An interesting witness at the Bloody Sunday inquiry in Derry will be Colin Wallace, a former army information officer in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wallace is due to give evidence for two whole days on 19 and 20 September, largely because he played a crucial role in formulating and presenting the army case at the Widgery tribunal in 1972, which whitewashed the army role in the shooting dead of 13 demonstrators.

Mr Wallace may have much interesting information about the army's plans and preparations for the whitewash. He may also be asked about his role in forging a leaflet advertising a vigil to commemorate Bloody Sunday a year after the event. The forgery was based on a real leaflet advertising the vigil, in which the sponsors included well-known radicals of the time such as Peter Hain.

The leaflet was skilfully doctored by Wallace's "black propaganda" team at Lisburn; and the forgery was part of an intelligence operation called Clockwork Orange, which started as an anti-terrorist campaign and developed after the election of a minority Labour government in March 1974 into a full-scale smear of Labour ministers.

In the summer of 1974, the forged Bloody Sunday leaflet was put in the secret file that Colin Wallace would show visiting journalists. "If you want to know the real truth about Labour ministers," he would say, "have a look at these documents." Five Labour MPs' names were skilfully forged into the list of sponsors of the Bloody Sunday vigil: Merlyn Rees, then secretary of state for Northern Ireland; Stan Orme, his minister of state; Tony Benn, secretary of state for industry; David Owen, health minister; and Paul Rose, who was not in the government but had founded the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster.

In the two days Mr Wallace gives evidence he may get an opportunity to explain what on earth he was doing smearing his elected government on behalf of the British army.

PS: Among the journalists who may take an interest in Wallace's evidence to the Saville inquiry are David McKittrick of the *Independent* and John Ware of the BBC. In a celebrated smear worthy of Clockwork Orange, both journalists took up a whole page in the *Independent* in 1987 to denounce Wallace as a poseur. One of their more illuminating lines of attack was that Wallace's claim to have been associated with putting the army case at the Widgery tribunal was "demonstrably false".

Colin Wallace

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE torrent of media interest following the arrest of Wessex Water chief Colin Skellett for allegedly receiving a near £1m "bribe" from the Malaysian buyers of the former Enron subsidiary overlooked a simple but potentially very influential truth. Successful prosecutions of businessmen for this type of backhander corruption are notoriously difficult and as a result far fewer than the number of inconclusive investigations. The reasons lie in the antiquated Prevention of Corruption acts, almost a century old, and the difficulty of proving a corrupt act if both sides deny it and there is no conclusive rebuttal evidence.

Skellett has strenuously denied that the £910,000 he received from YTL Power was any form of bribe. The money he says was paid into his personal bank account in July weeks after YTL, part of Malaysia's largest construction group, snatched Wessex Water from the hands of favoured bidders Royal Bank of Scotland for £1.24bn. Skellett says the money was an upfront payment for a five-year consultancy agreement to lock him into Wessex and YTL run by the billionaire Malaysian Yeoh family. He denies any role in the May takeover saying this was all handled from Houston. Other Wessex executives say they did not even know YTL was in the game until it won.

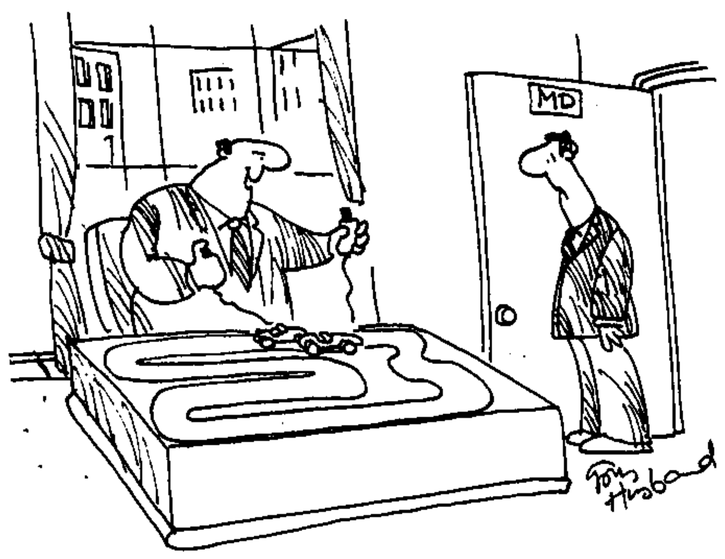
After being questioned Skellett was released on police bail without charge until January while the City Police question Wessex executives and make inquiries in Malaysia and the United States. Martin Bushnell, a Yeoh adviser, has also been bailed. Bushnell was involved in both the Wessex takeover and the subsequent agreement with Skellett.

On the basis that the best form of defence is attack, Skellett was quick to give a series of interviews in which he denied any wrongdoing. But there are a number of puzzling questions left by his answers. Questions that are certain to form the basis of the expected lengthy police inquiry.

Why should YTL be so keen to keep Skellett that they were prepared to pay him a near £1m "golden hello" up front with seemingly no handcuffs attached to ensure he worked the contract? By his own admission he had not threatened to resign. What had he done to merit such generous treatment, even if the Malaysians prize loyalty?

Why would Skellett want such a one-off payment up front given the tax implications ? Almost £400,000 – 40 per cent – would be payable in tax unless he could organise some sophisticated tax avoidance or deferral, whereas spread over the five years the tax bite could be reduced more easily.

Why did he not immediately inform his fellow Wessex Water directors of the arrangement? Skellett says he planned to do so at a board



"Come in Parker... yours is the blue car"

meeting shortly before he was arrested. But was that not an urgent item of business for colleagues to know as they became used to a new employer?

How was the money routed to Skellett and what was the role if any of Bushnell in the payment? At first it was suggested the money had come through Bushnell. Skellett denies this. YTL also said it paid Skellett direct. Skellett suggests his bankers Barclays tipped off the police when such a large amount was paid into his account. He suggests Barclays saw it as a "suspicious transaction" as characterised by anti-money laundering regulations. But as they knew Skellett and presumably knew where the money came from why should they be suspicious? Perhaps this is why it is suggested the tip came from another source.

What exactly is the history of the relationship between Skellett and Bushnell? Were there any discussions between them or third parties about Wessex before YTL launched its surprise bid? Was YTL able to obtain confidential information which enabled it to outmanoeuvre the RBS syndicate and evaluate the right price to pay? Skellett and Bushnell deny any impropriety.

These questions won't go away particularly because, despite the denials, there will be those, no doubt unfairly, who will point to the fact that bribery is not exactly unknown as a business strategy for Malaysian companies even though no such allegation has ever been proved against YTL or the Yeohs who deny such behaviour.

Transparency International, which monitors corruption around the world, did not give Malaysia a good report in its most recent 2002 corruption perception index which came out shortly after Skellett was arrested. This index ranks countries on the extent to which corruption is seen as a problem. On a scale of 10 (representing clean) Malaysia ranked 33 out of 101 countries scoring a less than impressive 4.9, on a par with Hungary and Trinidad, where there is a major corruption inquiry going on involving senior government officials and contracts.

Malaysia fared little better in TI's 2002 bribe payer index which ranks countries from which companies are perceived as likely to offer bribes. There it was 15 out of 23 scoring 4.3. More than South Korea, Taiwan and China but less than Japan. But at least things are getting better. In 1999 Malaysia scored only 3.9. Earlier this year TI reported that in South Africa, Malaysian companies were perceived as among those more likely to offer bribes to get business.

None of which of course is to suggest that this is proof that the payment to Skellett was a bribe.

Proof will depend on the police investigation. To bring a prosecution it will have to be proved that the £910,000 was either corruptly given and/or corruptly received. The problems in proving why a payment is made were shown in the recent Co-operative Wholesale Society case. Two CWS executives were convicted and jailed for receiving £1m each for extending a contract. The man accused of making the payments, Andrew Regan, who denies corruption, faces trial next year. Ace corrupter of local politicians and officials T Dan Smith was acquitted at a subsequent separate trial of the corruption of a London council boss who had himself already been convicted of being bribed by Smith.

It is also necessary to show that in taking the bribe the defendant acted against the interests of his principal or employer. This could be difficult when YTL says Skellett did nothing wrong and so does Wessex. At the moment the police do not have a complainant.

The lack of a principal (or principles even) is one reason why it has proved so difficult to prosecute MPs for corruption, including those who took bulging envelopes from the phoney Pharaoh, Mohamed Fayed. MPs have no employer and so are not covered by the archaic acts which presumed our elected representatives to be incorruptible!

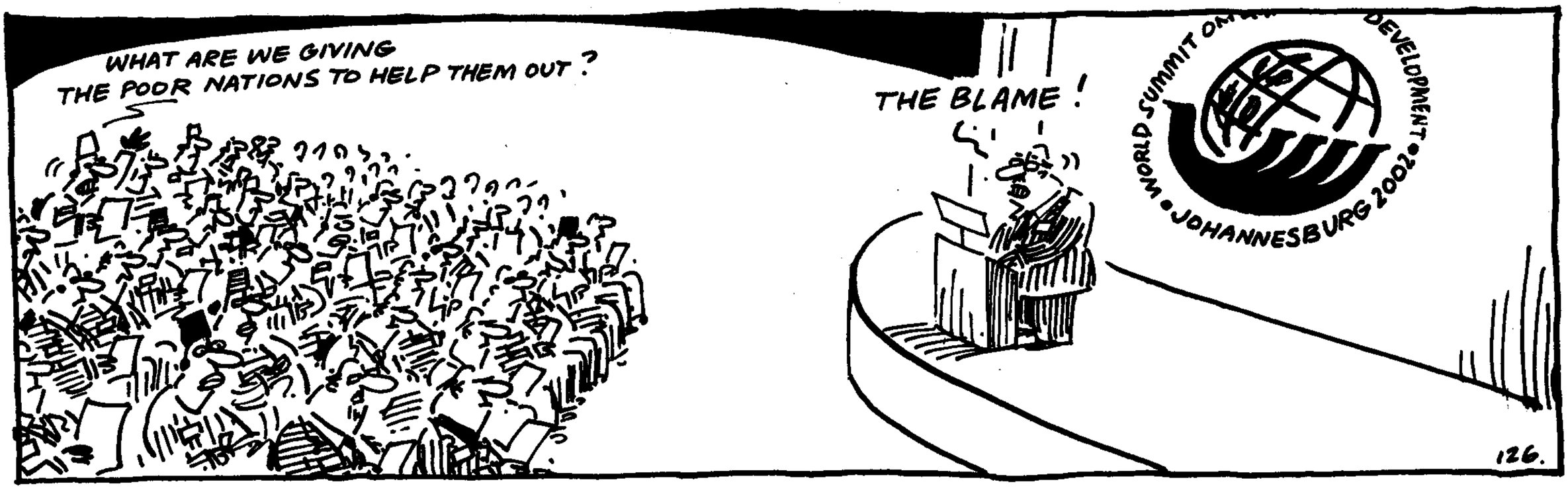
These legal problems are why there have been relatively few similar corruption prosecutions in recent years using the Prevention of Corruption Acts although there have been many investigations. In addition to the CWS case this year, the Serious Farce Office has brought a small number against guilty suits who pocketed backhanders such as former Hill Samuel banker Gordon Skingley and the British Bus case. Usually the problem is solved by using different approaches such as fraud or theft.

Labour has promised to reform the ancient legislation to bring MPs within the frame as was done with public officials who are much more easily prosecuted than businessmen. But like its agreement to make bribing foreign officials abroad a criminal offence – another loophole in the law – this is still awaited. Despite the Dear Leader's promise ahead of the Earth Summit to force the exposure of corrupt payments by oil and mining companies, we are still waiting for both changes to come into law. Britain was one of the slowest countries to sign up for the international agreement to ban corruption by multinational companies.

All of which suggests that whatever the suspicions, proving the allegations in the Skellett case could be a long time coming. But then again that could be simply because there is nothing to prove against either the Wessex Water chairman or his Malaysian benefactors.

THE DIRECTORS

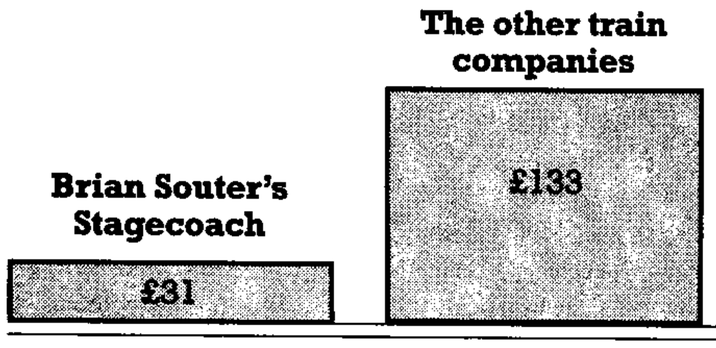
DREDGE/RIGG


WHAT ARE WE GIVING
THE POOR NATIONS TO HELP THEM OUT ?
THE BLAME !
WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT • JOHANNESBURG 2002 •
126.

Stock Horror

STAGECOACH:
Highway Robbery

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...

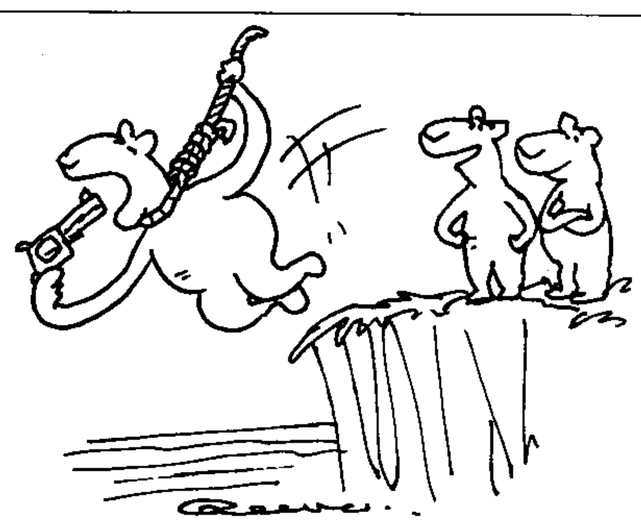


THE casting of Ivan Fallon as the saviour of the *Independent* and its Sunday sister paper with his promotion to chief executive of owners Independent News & Media will doubtless amuse investors in his other recent success story, iTouch. The mobile phone text messaging venture was launched in August 2000 after it had already become clear that the dot-com bubble had burst.

Fallon's master Tony O'Reilly persisted with the spin-off even though investors demanded the offer price be slashed from 130p to 70p. Today the shares are 14p. In May chairman Fallon reported bigger losses and is still sitting on a £39m cash pile handed to him by investors mad enough to have subscribed for the shares two years ago.

Meanwhile those at the two near virtual newspapers will be reassured by Fallon's long history of supporting only the most stringent journalistic standards. As evidenced by writing hagiographies about the rich men he admired and wished to emulate – Sir James Goldsmith, the Saatchis and of course his present employer who has made him rich by assuming the white man's burden in Sir Tony's South African empire for the past eight years. Not to overlook his enjoyment of the phoney pharaoh's hospitality and his support for Cap'n Bob and Alzheimer's fraud Ernest Saunders when at the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Telegraph*.

Clearly things can only now get better at the Indie.



"He's a lemming's lemming"

THE prosecution of City PR man and sometime journalist Tim Blackstone for alleged insider dealing may throw an interesting light on the role of PR men as sources of inside information used by the unscrupulous. Certainly PR men were part of the circle relied upon by the *Mirror* City Slickers. Blackstone has been summonsed as the only result to date of the two-year Department of Timidity & Inaction's investigation into the discredited *Mirror* tipsters with whom he was close. Blackstone is accused of buying shares in a client, Murray Financial, ahead of a price-sensitive announcement. Murray was also tipped by the Slickers, Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell.

There have been several investigations in the past by the Stock Exchange and the DTI into suspect share deals conducted by PR men involving their company clients. The Blackstone case may shine an interesting light into this dark corner. Who knows, it may be the only corner of the Slickers scandal to be so illuminated. But given the DTI's abysmal record Blackstone, who denies the allegations, may have little to fear.

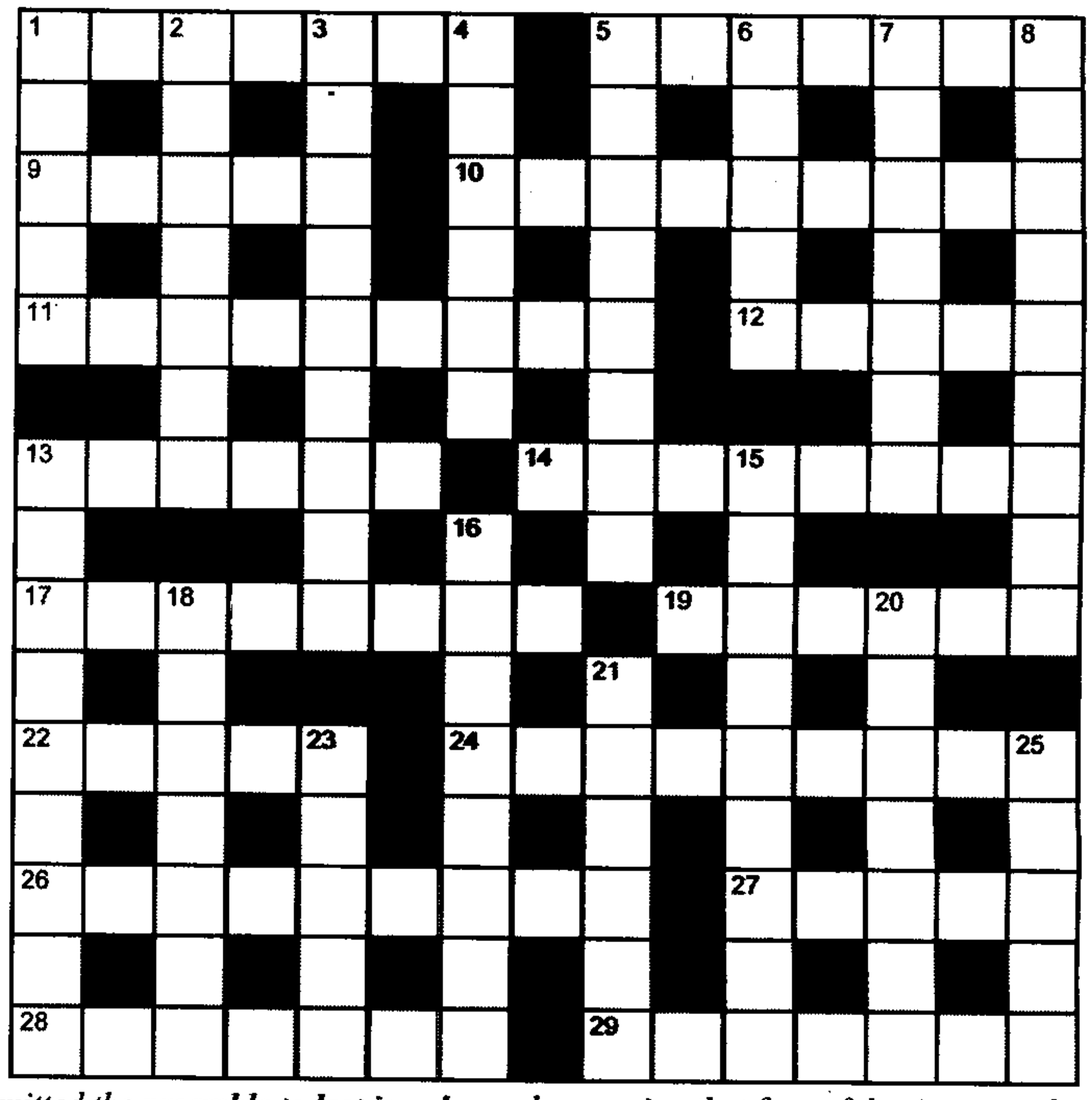
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 217

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 13 September 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



● *Cyclops aplogises for having omitted the preamble to last issue's puzzle, warning that four of the Across and three of the Down clues lacked a definition, and that their solutions had a common meaning. This made the puzzle virtually impossible, but 109 readers still managed to answer the whole thing correctly.*

ACROSS

1/5 Irritating being glass-bottomed, to an auditor (1,4,2,3,4)
9 Lush treatment cuts out half the sound of a clock it's said (5)
10 Under a legal obligation, having gone in for bondage and climax reached (5,4)
11 Scored high but failed (7,2)
12 Rich man's model parliament (5)
13 Barker's underwear (6)
14 Victoria was redundant gobbling one at Beckham's foot (8)
17 Ballsy diagonal humping (8)
19 Revolting, sod off without pecuniary obligation (6)
22 Streep – somebody's heart races (5)
24 Sentimental, shy Czech Nos. 1 and 2 pissed imbibing whisky (9)
26 Pompous, having had too much oral sex (9)
27 The old blokes' republic (5)
28 "I ate – fug off and poop!" (7)
29 Triumphal cry of ex-minister: "'e's away – that'll keep the char warm!" (7)

DOWN

1 Presidential staff's reported loss of immunity (5)
2 One sort of HRT gets one cross – it's very infectious (7)
3 It could be heavenly, Mars bar, without the impediment (4,5)
4 Not a celeb for whom head alone is sufficient (6)
5 Fitting centrally before screwing and hammering (8)
6 Climax with a bang, then finish yourself off? (3,2)
7 Parties go in for invective – happy times! (4-3)
8 Old Athenian said "You saw the ones here," in a silly foreign accent (9)
13 Leave tap artist with Dicky (6,3)
15 *Eye* had one MP snapping, "Journalistic excess!" (5,4)
16 Toss off within granted range (3,5)
18 Objection to Labour's laid-back response? (2,5)
20 Best uses pot? Sadly one not forthcoming (7)
21 White House chiefs trashed Tony – who would argue with that? (3,3)
23 Head honcho, right coy bastard, boards aircraft (2,3)
25 Lewinsky finally topless, tosses off Clinton and others like him (5)

Crossword 216 winner: MARTIN WARBURTON

ACROSS: 8 In gear 9 Harelip 10 Wank 11 **Hokum 12/15 Beat the meat** 13 Leeway 16 Failing eyesight 19 Azimuth 20 Cognac 21 Frig 22 Excel 23 **Tory 24/25 Flog the bishop.**

DOWN: 1 In camera 2 Jerk 3 Archly 4 **Choke the chicken 5 Premiere 6 Clobbering** 7 Optant 14 Wellington 17 Nauseate 18 Headroom 19 Adrift 20 **Celebs 23 Toss.**

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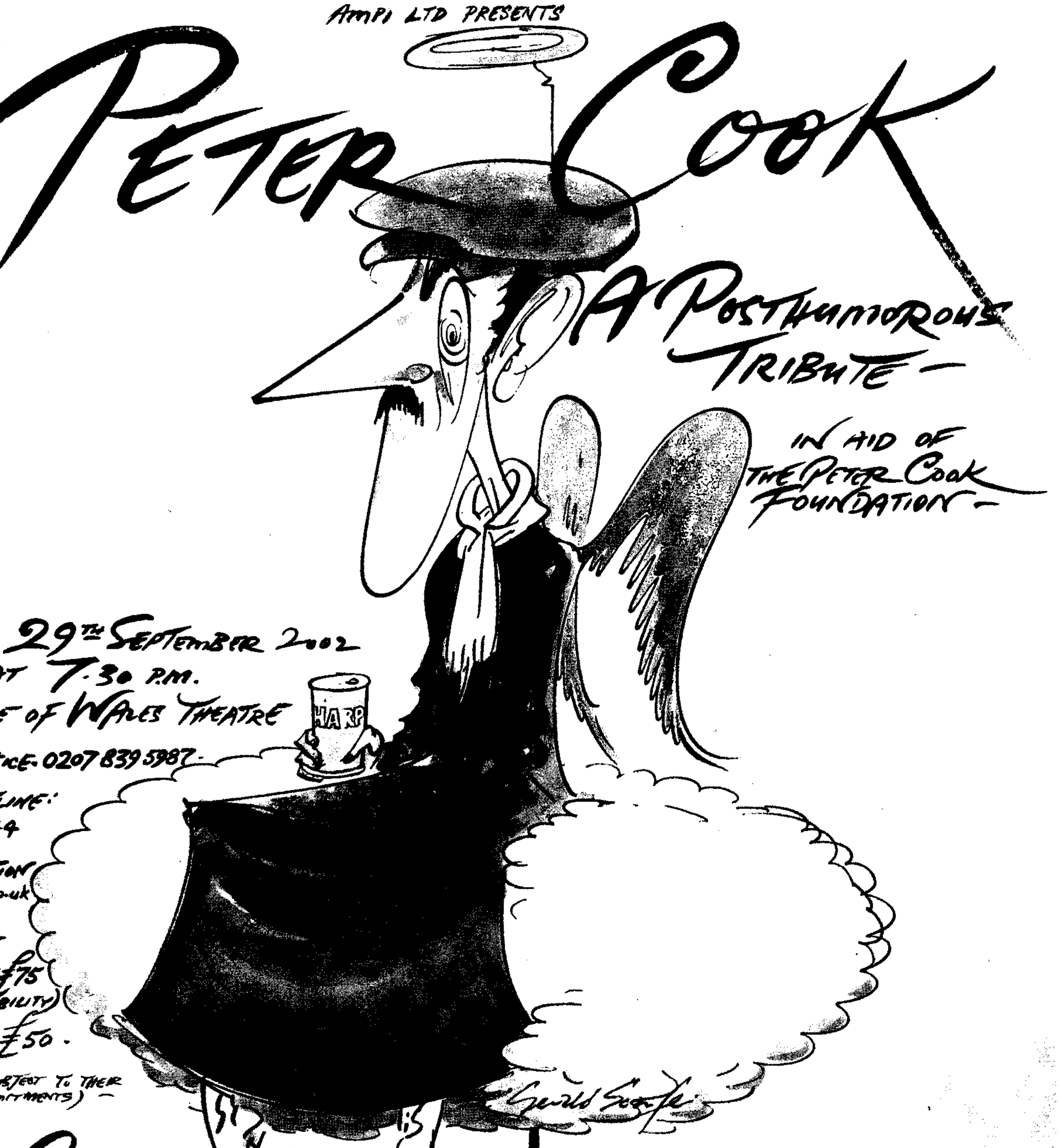

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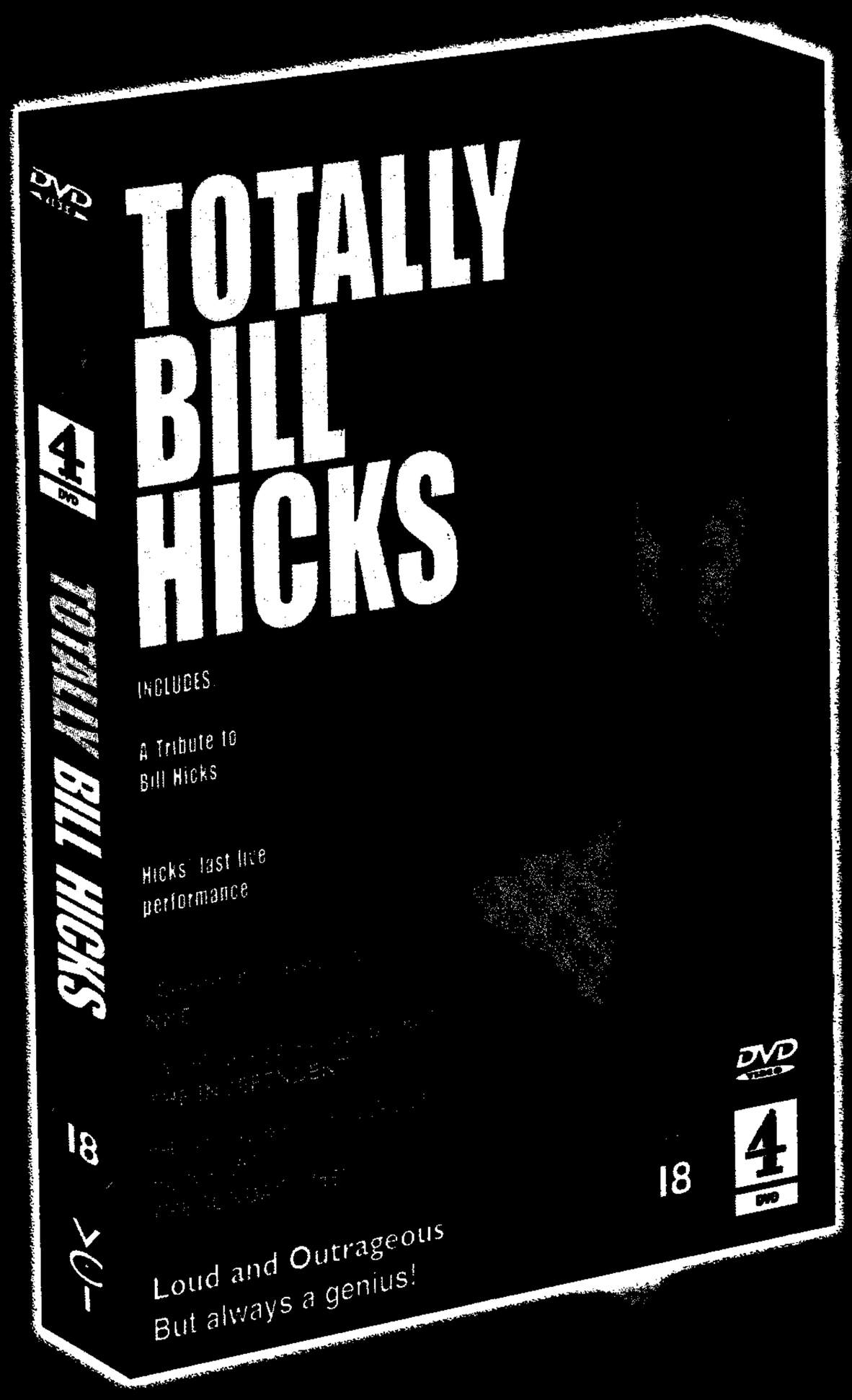

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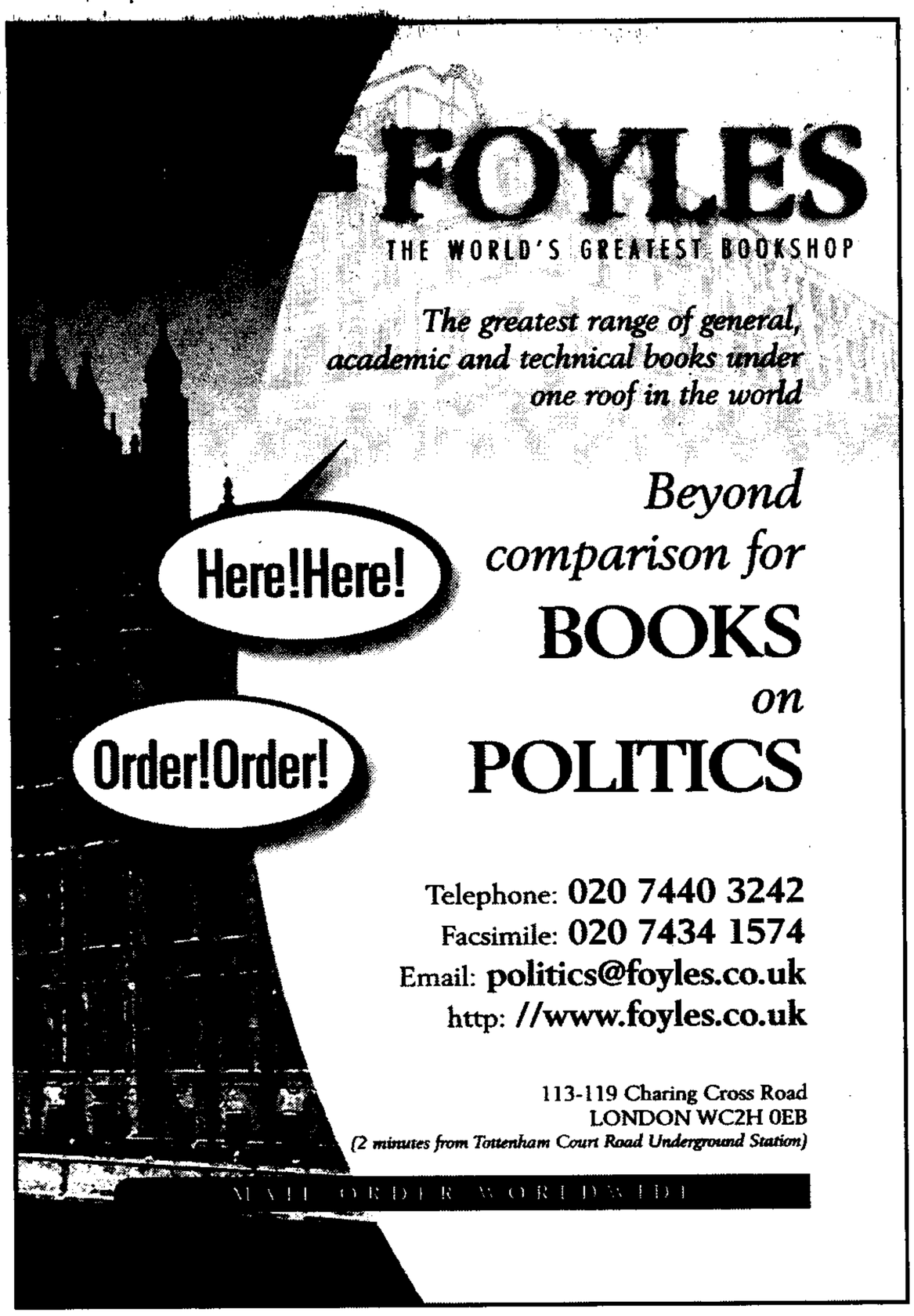

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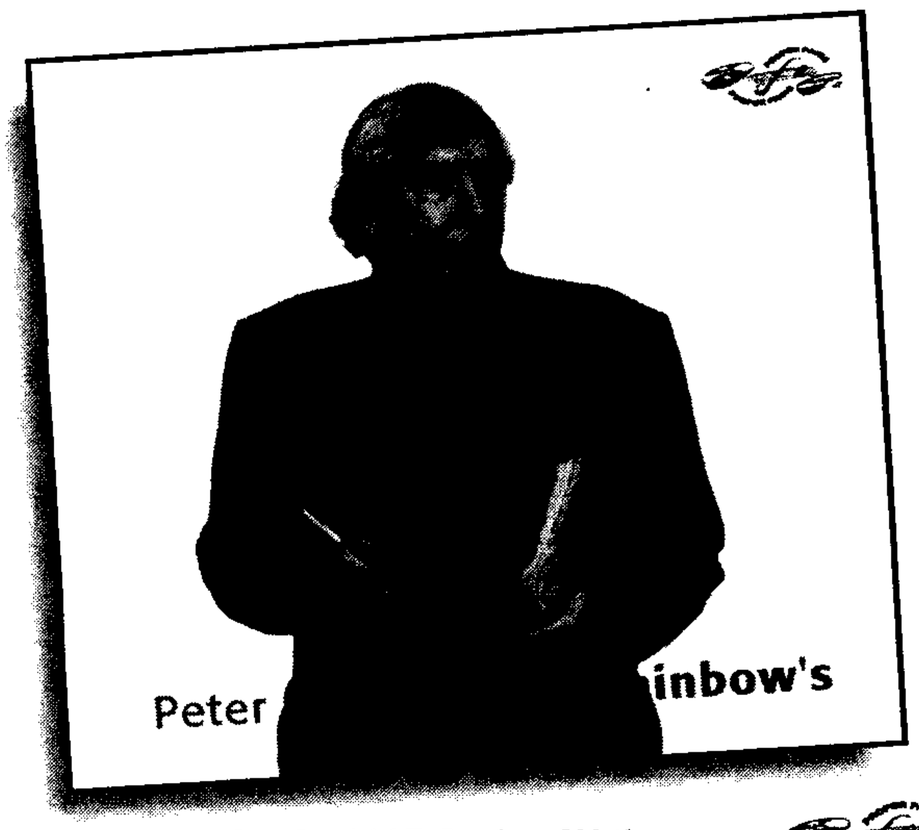

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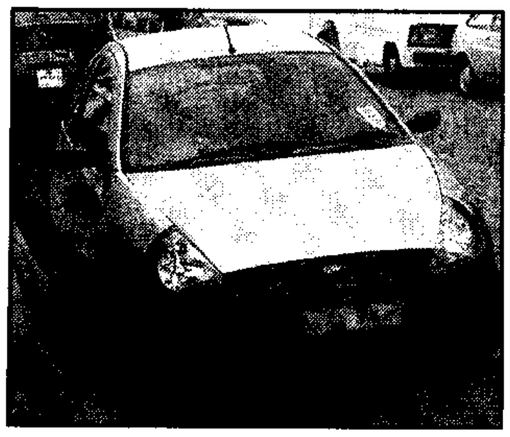

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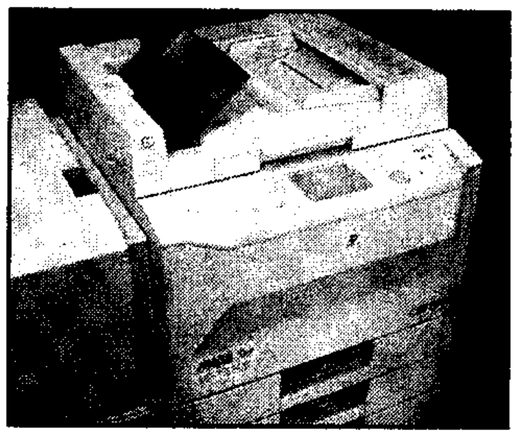
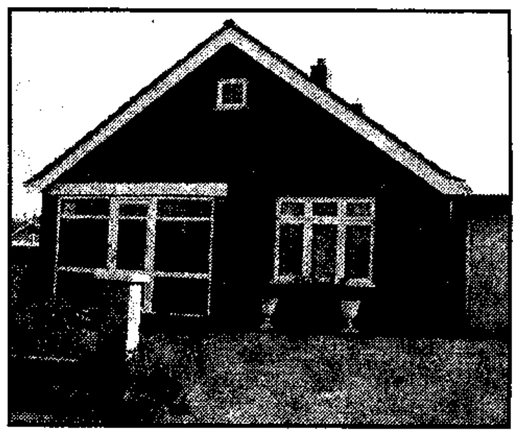


Minolta Photocopier. 1 year old. Perfect working order. Liquidation Sale. Auction price **£22.**



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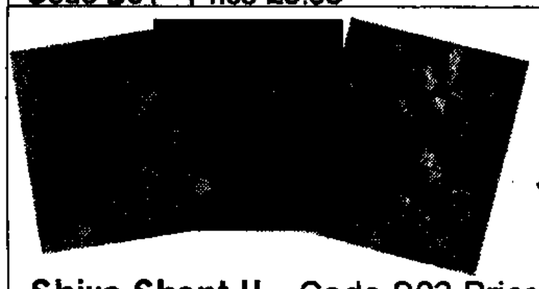

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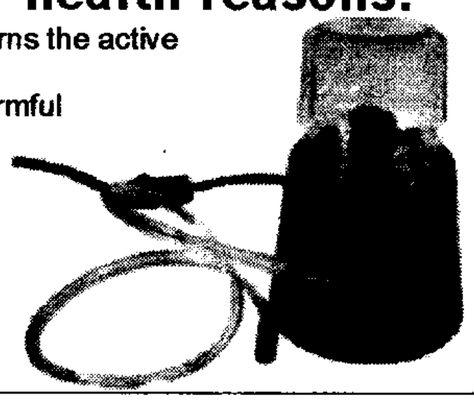

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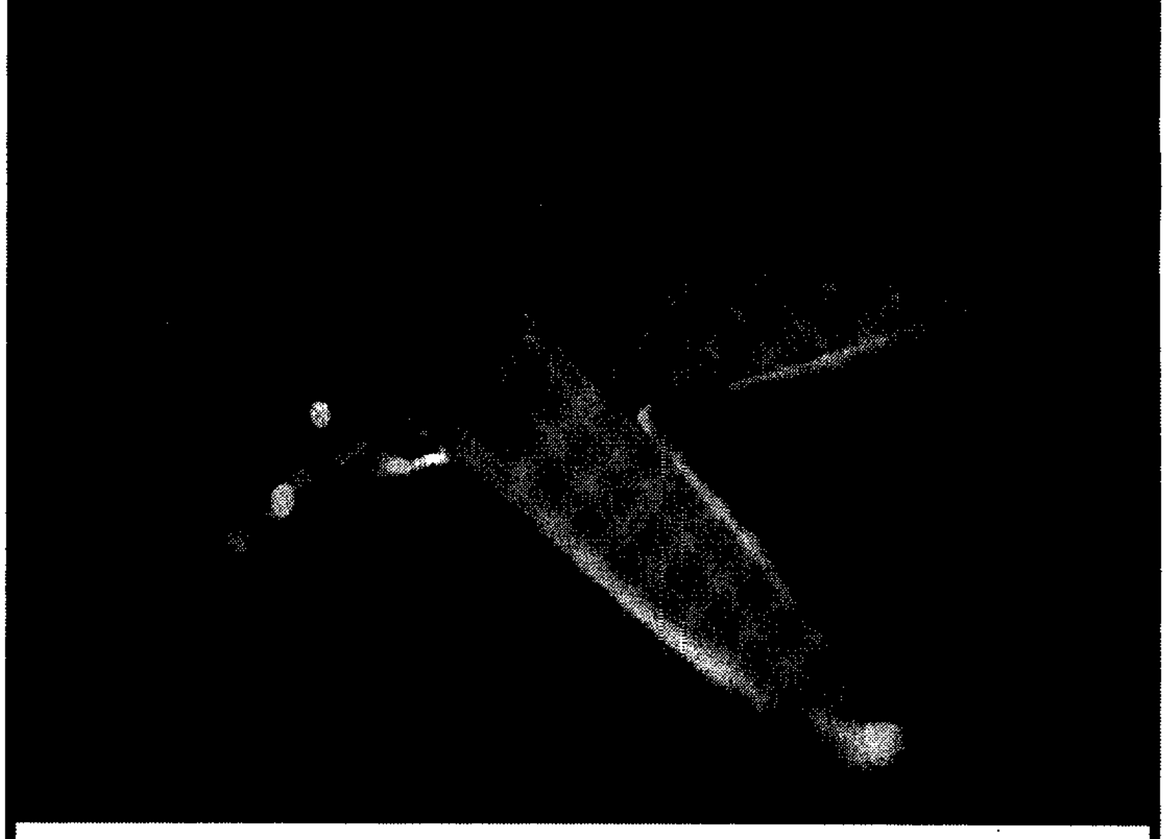

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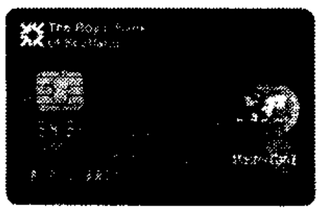

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SPEECHWRITING by Britain's LEADING PROFESSIONAL, Mitch Murray – see page 34.

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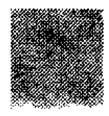

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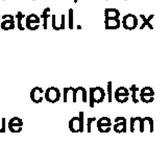

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Hong Kong: Michael Foggo Suites 1601–1603, Kinwick Centre, 32 Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong
Tel: +852 2542 1177 Fax: +852 2545 0550 Email: hk@SovereignGroup.com

Isle of Man: Paul Brennock Trafalgar House, 25 Nelson Street, Douglas, Isle of Man IM1 2AN
Tel: +44 1624 699800 Fax: +44 1624 699801 Email: iom@SovereignGroup.com

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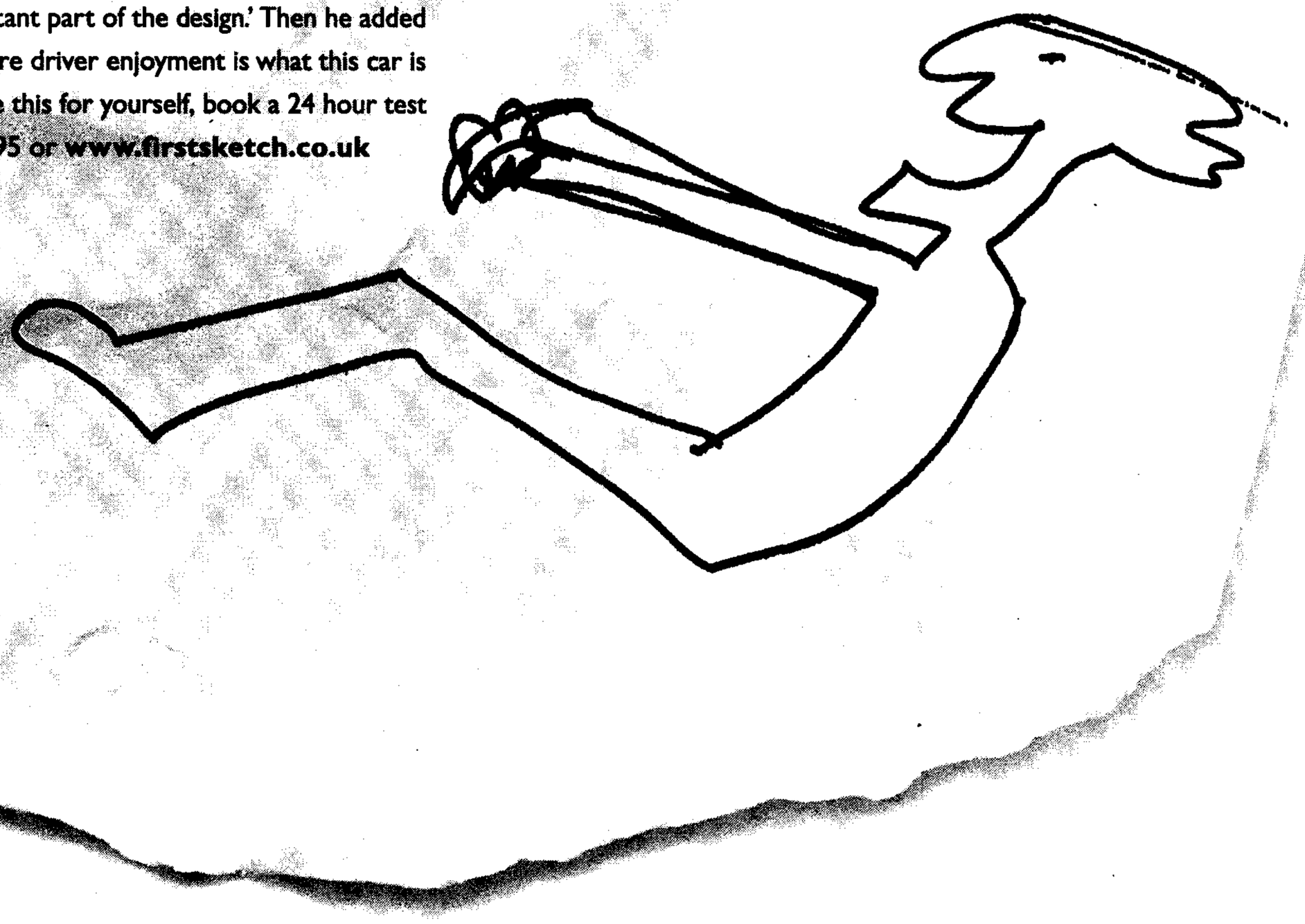
The First Sketch.

When we asked our designer to explain the idea behind the all-new Saab 9-3 Sport Saloon, he drew the driver. 'This,' he said, 'is the most important part of the design.' Then he added the grin saying: 'And pure driver enjoyment is what this car is all about.' To experience this for yourself, book a 24 hour test drive on 0845 300 93 95 or **www.firstsketch.co.uk**



Brought to life.

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The all new Saab 93 Sport Saloon.

OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION IN MPG (LITRES/100KM): URBAN 23.9 (11.8), EXTRA URBAN 42.8MPG (6.6), COMBINED 33.2 (8.5). CO_2 EMISSIONS 204G/KM. ALL FIGURES FOR SAAB 9-3 SPORT SALOON AERO (210BHP) WITH MANUAL GEARBOX.